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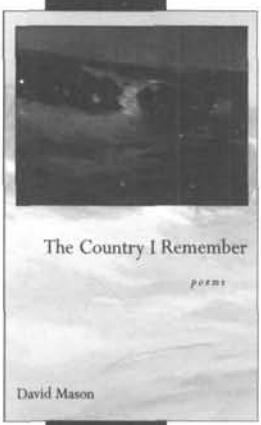

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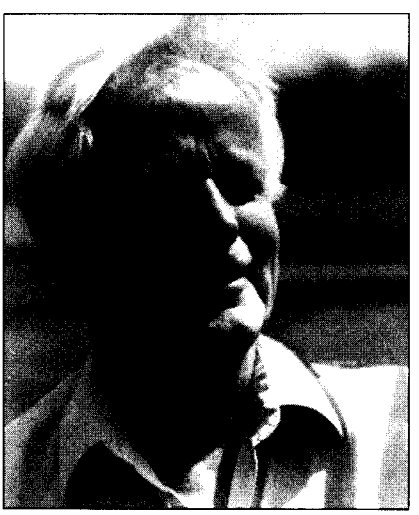

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VOLUME XLIX NUMBER 1 SPRING 1996

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TO OUR READERS

A new book by an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been published. In accordance with our policy, it will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Scrambled Eggs and Whiskey: Poems 1991–1995.* Copper Canyon Press. $25.00; $14.00.

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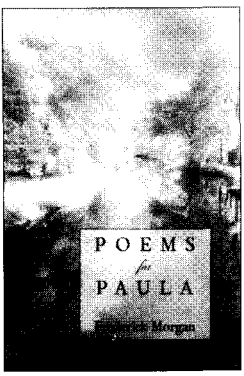
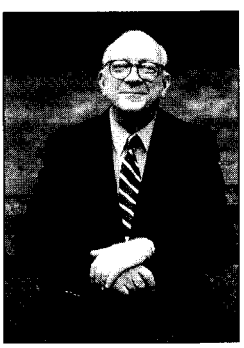


POEMS FOR PAULA

by FREDERICK MORGAN



FREDERICK MORGAN, a founding editor of *The Hudson Review*, continues today as a co-editor. He is the author of nine books of poetry, including *Poems: New and Selected*, and two volumes of prose.

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DANA GIOIA

The Hand of the Poet: The Magical Value of Manuscripts

I

Young artists are cruel, especially to their parents. Although my mother and father both worked six days a week, I did my best to keep Sunday from becoming their day of rest. Besotted by art books in the local public library, I was at twelve a voracious gallery-goer. Satisfying my aesthetic appetites, however, depended on nagging my parents to travel from industrial Hawthorne to the widely scattered cultural shrines of Southern California. And so one Sunday my exhausted father drove across Los Angeles to smoggy San Marino so I might visit the Henry E. Huntington Library and Museum. I was keen to take in the Gainsboroughs, Reynoldses, Constables, and Turners assembled by the late robber baron—the finest collection of Georgian painting outside London. I hardly knew there was a library on the hundred-acre estate, but since it also housed a small room of Renaissance madonnas, I decided to look it over.

The treasures of the Huntington Library are internationally known to scholars and bibliophiles, but to a working-class kid from Southwest L. A. they seemed more mysterious abstractions than objects of intrinsic interest. A nerdy autodidact, I was precociously well-informed on painting, but my literary taste ran to Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ray Bradbury, and H. P. Lovecraft. I shuffled dutifully from display case to display case in the manner of a twelve-year-old boy—squinting, gawking, and gaping. I was indifferent to the Ellesmere Chaucer. The Gutenberg Bible impressed me only as a vague rarity. Shelley's notebooks and the manuscript of *Walden* got hardly a glance. But one exhibit held me spellbound. In a glass case in the main hall lay a fair copy of Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" written in the author's small, meticulous hand.

I knew the poem well. Indeed, I knew most of it by heart.

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"Annabel Lee" was a favorite of my mother, who often recited it with obvious feeling. One purpose of poetry is to give us words to articulate our joys and sorrows without revealing them. Whenever my mother spoke Poe's words, I also heard between his lines the unspoken losses that had scarred her life.

> For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams
> Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
> And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes
> Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
> And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
> Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride
> In her sepulchre there by the sea—
> In her tomb by the side of the sea.

But did I really know the poem? Staring at the manuscript, I found myself seeing it from a different perspective. I was overwhelmed by its sheer beauty—the elegant script in brown sepia with every letter perfectly formed, the way Poe had skillfully glued two pieces of paper together to make a single tall sheet so that the poem could be presented on one page. I knew also that Poe had intended for me to be overwhelmed. His wife dead, his career in tatters, sunk in debt, drinking heavily in the last year of his life, Poe had obviously labored to make this keepsake—probably given to some casual acquaintance—as beautiful an object as possible. For the first time in my life I had a sense of the complex, even contradictory human reality out of which art grows. I also saw how delicately the text of a poem balanced between two lives—the author and the reader. "Who touches this," Walt Whitman wrote of his own work, "touches a man." Looking at the manuscript through the glass, I wished I might someday make something so beautiful.

Since that afternoon I have been interested in literary manuscripts, especially autograph versions of poems. This interest has never been a consuming passion, and I have resisted the temptation to collect. (Any manuscript I could afford, I probably wouldn't want.) But in the intervening years I have rarely passed up the opportunity to attend a library exhibition, and in working on major critical projects, I examined whatever archival sources I could find, even if they did not bear directly on my topic. More recently I have spent considerable time studying many of the

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extraordinary manuscripts in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. In the process of this desultory research, I have come to wonder about the odd world of literary archives.

A great deal has been written about literary manuscripts, but nearly all of it has been bibliographic, textual, or commercial. Bibliographers assiduously catalogue and classify archival material. There are directories that list every known manuscript of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Yeats. Textual scholars customarily cross-reference manuscript variants in compiling definitive editions. Bookdealers and auctioneers publish lavish catalogues describing and often illustrating the literary manuscripts they hope to sell. The body of *descriptive* material about manuscripts is immense, but one finds virtually no critical or theoretical writing on the subject. There is little informed analysis or speculation, that is, on the curious place of manuscripts in the broader literary culture; nor is much serious consideration given to their special status versus printed texts. If scholars have customarily discussed manuscripts in utilitarian terms, critics and theorists have ignored them altogether as a subject of independent inquiry.

In the absence of serious critical or theoretical interest, the terms for discussing manuscripts have mostly been set by the marketplace—the world of dealers, auction houses, and collectors. Although the private sector recognized the importance of manuscripts long before scholars and librarians made any systematic effort to retrieve and conserve them, the marketplace has done little to explore the real value of its material. It would not be altogether unfair to suggest that, like Oscar Wilde's cynic, the marketplace "knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." Of course, one might make the same complaint about the New York Stock Exchange. What the marketplace does is price things. Questions of value belong elsewhere.

The lack of speculative thinking and critical analysis, however, has not slowed the bustling world of literary manuscripts. Few areas of literary life are as full of purposeful and engaged activity. Thousands of librarians, curators, dealers, and scholars—as well as numerous private collectors—are currently building huge archives of primary materials. No other culture in history has even approached the level of activity now routine in America. Our institutions spend vast sums to acquire and house manuscript material. Large crowds view public exhibitions while scholars fill

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reading rooms to study it in detail. Bibliographic journals, exhibition catalogues, and auction catalogues pour from the presses. Newspapers review major shows and cover significant auctions. Without fully articulating why, the culture has agreed that, even in an era of shrinking resources, collecting and preserving literary manuscripts is a priority. Two hundred years ago no one would have bothered to save the contents of most contemporary archives. Why have literary manuscripts become so widely valued? How did the change come about? And what do current assumptions about manuscripts reveal about modern literary culture?

"All literary manuscripts," Philip Larkin once observed, "have two kinds of value: what might be called the magical value and the meaningful value." No one today doubts the scholarly or "meaningful" importance of literary manuscripts. Auction houses and dealers sell them at ever-higher prices. Libraries announce the acquisition of a famous writer's papers with the same blare of publicity that accompanies a medical breakthrough. The public rationale for collecting manuscripts is that they provide information not usually found elsewhere. This scholarly argument is cogent if—as we shall see later—also incomplete. Manuscripts can solve factual problems like dating a poem or establishing an accurate text. It is not uncommon for a scholar studying the manuscripts of a literary work to discover that some obscure line in the standard printed text contains a mistranscription. Herman Melville's mysterious image in *White Jacket* of the "soiled fish of the sea"—much praised by F. O. Matthiesen—became, upon examination of Melville's original, the more literal "coiled fish of the sea." A famous critical puzzle turned out to be a misprint.

Manuscripts also illuminate the broader meanings of a literary work. Seeing what a poet cut out often helps clarify what was left in. Drafts can elucidate an author's intention in a particular piece. Diaries, letters, notebooks, and other documents add to the knowledge of a writer's life and milieu. Ezra Pound's compressed, cranky, and cryptic letters from Rapallo, Italy prepare the reader for the allusive and increasingly idiosyncratic *Cantos* he wrote concurrently. The "meaningful value" of manuscripts often transcends their purely verbal contents. Sometimes even the physical materials used suggest certain insights about an author's life. Emily Dickinson's carefully composed and fastidiously recopied packets of poems, usually handbound in thread,

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not only reveal the poet's class position in the New England gentry, which could afford the materials and leisure to prepare such fascicles; the packets also show the essentially private medium that constituted Dickinson's "publication." Not even her family knew the extent of her literary output. After Emily died in 1886, her sister Lavinia was astonished to see how many poems had been stashed away in the drawers of the bedroom bureau.

Best of all, manuscripts often contain new work. Few authors publish everything they write. The *Nachlass* (to use the German term for an author's literary remains) almost inevitably reveals unknown material. The final version of John Keats's sonnet, "Bright Star, Would I were Stedfast as Thou Art," was found in the author's hand, inscribed in his copy of Shakespeare's poems. In extreme cases like Dickinson or Gerard Manley Hopkins, virtually all of the work emerges posthumously from unpublished papers. Only seven of Dickinson's 1775 known poems appeared during her lifetime. Moreover, in the first editions of her work, her poems were rewritten by her editors into more conventional styles. Later editors returned to the manuscripts to restore her authentic versions. Hopkins published virtually nothing after joining the society of Jesus—only three comic triolets and three Latin versions of English poems. His mature work did not appear until 1918, thirty years after his death. His literary executor, Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, carefully put together the first collection from four manuscripts he had assembled—like a classicist preparing an edition of Horace by collating and comparing the surviving manuscripts.

The manuscripts of a poem can be divided into three general categories—the working drafts, the final manuscript, and fair copies. Each type of manuscript affords certain insights into the author and the work. The working drafts (or worksheets) of a poem reveal the author's creative process. If all the worksheets survive, they track the poem's development from the author's initial impulse to the text's final form. Many authors, however, discard their drafts. Among the seven thousand items contained in the Huntington Library's Wallace Stevens archive, for example, one will find no worksheets. Working drafts also demonstrate the often significant differences in process between poets. Lord Byron seems to have written with remarkable swiftness and self-possession. His poems usually achieve some recognizable version of their ultimate shape in the first draft. The folio-size worksheets

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of *Don Juan* in the Berg Collection show whole passages being composed and decisively polished to their final form on the same sheet of paper. Elizabeth Bishop, however, could fret for years over a single poem. The surviving drafts of "The Moose" show that Bishop worked on the 168-line poem for more than twenty-five years before publishing it in *The New Yorker* in 1972. (She then revised it again before putting it in a book.)

The final manuscript is in one sense merely the author's last draft of a poem or collection of poems. Although it represents the end of the private creative process, it also marks the beginning of the work's public life. The final manuscript leaves the writer's desk and enters the public realm of editors, publishers, lawyers, and censors. For earlier writers this ultimate draft was written by hand. For modern authors it has usually been a typescript. (Even in the age of personal computers, most poets continue to send along a "hard copy" in addition to a digital disk.) The final manuscript is uniquely valuable because it is the version of the text the author submits for publication. In artistic terms, it stands as the work achieved; in scholarly terms, it often best reveals the authorial intention. Literary works are often cut, revised, repunctuated, and even censored before publication for reasons that have nothing to do with the author's wishes. The punctuation of *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, the standard complete edition of Frost's poems, for instance, differs—according to Donald Hall—in over 1100 instances from the texts the poet himself put into print. By recasting Frost's poems into conventional punctuation, the book changes the rhythm and sometimes even the meaning of lines. If the best text of a poem is the one that represents the author's probable intentions, then the final manuscript provides a starting point for establishing that intention.

The comparison of the completed manuscript with the printed book can provide real revelations. E. E. Cummings' papers, for instance, show how the poet's language was sometimes censored for the publisher's concerns about obscenity. "*No words changed,*" he wrote Boni and Liveright, about the manuscript of his prose narrative, *The Enormous Room* (1922). He then specificed objectionable words should be deleted rather than replaced by euphemisms: "In cutting use dash———e.g. '———it,' said etc. (not 'chuck it,' said etc.)" His publisher nonetheless substantially revised his book without his approval—dropping character

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sketches, changing punctuation, translating French phrases into English, and removing supposed indecencies. The author's true version did not appear until 1978. The manuscript of Robinson Jeffers' 1948 collection, *The Double Axe and Other Poems*, now at the Humanities Research Center in Austin, reveals how Random House asked the author to delete ten poems and change several others for political reasons. Publisher Bennett Cerf and editor Saxe Commins were offended by the poet's criticism of Franklin Roosevelt. Although Jeffers reluctantly agreed to their changes, Random House insultingly placed an unprecedented publisher's disclaimer at the beginning of the volume announcing their disagreement with the author's political opinions. While boasting of Random House's commitment to "the writer's freedom," the note makes no mention of the omitted poems and many emendations, which remained unknown until a scholar examined the author's manuscript decades later. Jeffers' original versions were not published until 1976—fourteen years after the poet's death.

Authors, of course, also make changes after their work has been accepted for publication. "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight," Samuel Johnson observed, "it concentrates his mind wonderfully." The prospect of imminent publication clarifies an author's intentions. "Final" manuscripts frequently reveal last-minute changes by the author. The Berg's typescript of Jeffers' *Solstice* (1935) shows small revisions in the poet's hand—changes made for artistic rather than political reasons. Robert Lowell's typescript for *Imitations* (1961) in the Berg contains massive reworking for many of the author's free translations. The proofing stage, which is the traditional point where a text moves from the author's handwriting or typing to mechanical reproduction (although the advent of word-processing and electronic publishing have radically changed that process), also invites authorial changes. Seeing a text in the cold light of print changes an author's perspective. James Joyce repeatedly rewrote *Ulysses* in proof. Lowell's galleys of *Imitations* reveal his obsessive urge to revise. He once admitted that he could not see one of his own poems without feeling the need to change it.

Sometimes authors have the satisfaction of restoring their original versions. In the Berg's manuscript of Vladimir Nabokov's *Poems and Problems* (1970), the author's pleasure is tangible in the unhesitating revision of the final line of "On Translating *Eugene*

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Onegin." Striking out the bland ending foisted on him by the then prudish *New Yorker*, Nabokov reinstates his forceful original, a merciless but magisterial self-assessment of how his own English version of Pushkin, which occupied him for fourteen years, stands up to the Russian original: "Dove-droppings on your monument."

A fair copy is an autograph version of a poem written out or typed by the author after its completion or publication. (A "fair" copy contains no revisions or disfiguring corrections in contrast to a "foul" copy, which shows changes and emendations.) A fair copy, therefore, is often as much a keepsake as a literary artifact. Often intended as a gift or presentation piece, a fair copy usually displays the author's finest hand. Such manuscripts were immensely popular in the last century. Famous poets—and many poets truly ranked as celebrities then—were barraged with requests for autograph copies of their anthology pieces. The correspondence of nineteenth-century American poets reveals many such requests and replies. The Berg Collection, for instance, has a charming note from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Walt Whitman that accompanied some fair copies the Good Gray Poet had requested for two friends. The Collection also possesses no less than five fair copies of Oliver Wendell Holmes's patriotic mega-hit, "Old Ironsides."

To the confusion of archivists and scholars, worksheets, final manuscripts, and fair copies often end up in different locations. If worksheets are not discarded, they usually remain in the author's possession and are eventually placed with his or her papers. Working drafts, however, may also be sent to literary friends for comment and thereby end up in another writer's possession. Completed manuscripts almost inevitably remain in the files of editors or publishers. Fair copies are scattered among their recipients. It is a rare circumstance when an author's entire body of drafts and manuscripts—not to mention letters, journals, and diaries—end up in one institution. Elizabeth Bishop's worksheets reside mainly at Vassar. Many of the final typescripts of her poems and collections remained in the files of *The New Yorker* and Farrar, Straus & Giroux, both of whose archives are now in the New York Public Library. Assorted other manuscripts are at Harvard, Washington University (St. Louis), and the University of Delaware as well as in private hands.

Although the diaspora complicates certain types of research

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(and keeps biographers on the move), the much-lamented situation is not without its advantages. An author's manuscripts are available to a broader constituency when they are dispersed; they are seen—in private research or public exhibition—by a more diverse audience. Centralization is not an absolute virtue in the arts. Having every Botticelli under one roof might simplify the work of art historians, but it would impoverish the experience and education of countless gallery-goers. The Stanford Library had modest special collections during my student years, but in 1975 James Healy donated a small but superb collection of modern Irish literature, including W. B. Yeats's own copies of all Cuala Press books with his unpublished annotations on each flyleaf. The directors of established Yeats archives may complain that such an important collection did not belong in California, remote from most related material, but the Healy Collection was well cared for and much consulted. Its presence provided a tremendous boon to Stanford faculty and students.

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair," chant the prophetic witches in *Macbeth*, and indeed literary archivists generally consider fair copies less significant than working drafts. Worksheets offer scholarly insights; fair copies often seem mere souvenirs. And yet fair copies sometimes contain variant readings of a text, which may reflect an author's second thoughts about a poem. The elegant copy of "Ulalume—A Ballad" that Poe gave to a teenage girl he met a month before his death now stands as the definitive text of the poem. Fair copies also sometimes constitute the only surviving authorial manuscripts of a work, especially for pre-Romantic literature. What would textual scholars give for a copy—fair or foul—in Shakespeare's hand of *Hamlet*, a play whose "text" survives in three strikingly different and inconsistent printed versions? The Westmoreland Manuscript, for example, represents the only authorial source for most of John Donne's English poems, and this exquisitely penned fair copy provides the sole text for three of the Holy Sonnets. Even when several sources exist, a copy of a poem carefully written out in the author's hand—or, as in Donne's case, by an amanuensis—is a persuasive endorsement of the correctness of a particular reading. Worksheets may reveal the creative process, but a fair copy helps establish an authoritative text of the finished poem.

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II

But what is a finished poem? Is Paul Valéry correct in declaring that "A poem is never finished, only abandoned"? The study of literary manuscripts highlights a central issue of modern poetics—what constitutes a completed work of art? As Romantic philosophers shifted their attention from the analysis of a conventionally finished artwork to contemplation of the creative process, they initiated a shift in taste that continues today. Works that might have been considered incomplete and unsatisfying drafts a century earlier received enthusiastic approbation as fully achieved poems. In 1798 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the central English Romantic theorist, published "Kubla Khan" with the subtitle "A Fragment." In 1820 John Keats allowed the text of his abandoned poem, "Hyperion," which ends in mid-sentence, to appear in a collection. Another of Keats's most famous "poems" is an incomplete, eight-line passage found in the margin of a manuscript. The lines may represent the first draft of a poem or a possible speech for a projected play. First printed in 1898, these lines seemed to a modern sensibility perfectly self-sufficient.

> This living hand, now warm and capable
> Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
> And in the icy silence of the tomb,
> So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
> That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
> So in my veins red life might stream again,
> And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
> I hold it towards you.

If the Romantic period prized poetic fragments for revealing the artist's inner genius unfettered by the external constraints of classical form and propriety, the era also fostered an unprecedented reverence for literary manuscripts. Earlier ages had viewed a poet's holograph in purely functional terms. Once the text had been more decorously preserved in printed form, there was no special value seen in preserving the usually "foul" autograph copy. *Paradise Lost* was recognized on publication in 1667 as a masterpiece, but neither Milton nor his contemporaries took care to save the manuscript. Only one section of the huge

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original survived the curatorial indifference of immediate posterity. (This fragment still bearing the ink smudges of the printer now rests in the climate-controlled vaults of the Morgan Library.) The romantic *Zeitgeist*, however, endowed a page written in a famous poet's hand with a talismanic power. Matthew Arnold may have erred in prophesying that poetry would replace religion in guiding mankind, but his prediction suggests how—at least among literati—poetic manuscripts became Victorian society's equivalent of holy relics. Indeed, the luxurious nineteenth-century leather bindings and satin-lined boxes that house many of the Berg's famous manuscripts are the bibliophile's versions of *reliquaria*.

This shift in sensibility could probably only have occurred in the nineteenth century at the height of print culture. This was the first age of mass literacy, inexpensive printing, and rapid communication. Successive waves of technological and commercial innovation—daily journalism, universal post, telegraph service, pulp paper, broadscale advertising, dime novels—gradually changed the frame of reference for human knowledge and communication. For the first time in history it seemed that most information was announced, disseminated, preserved, and codified on the printed page. Authors occupied a critical position in the new print-driven economy. To use a contemporary metaphor, writers created the programming that ran the information and entertainment networks of print culture. Before film, radio, television, recordings, telephones, and computers, the writer exercised a near monopoly on information. Since fame was a function of print, successful authors could achieve vast celebrity; since ideas traveled most quickly and farthest in print, they could also exercise immense influence.

The poet commanded a unique and privileged position in nineteenth-century print culture. Embodying the still powerful link between the new age and earlier oral traditions, the poet practiced the most venerable literary art—rooted in spoken language but easily transmitted in print—and the typographic bard still played an almost priestly role. No one was shocked when a novelist or playwright went to the bad; those professions had at best dubious reputations. But a famously dissolute poet like Byron or the young Swinburne exercised the evil fascination of a fallen angel. Fiction now dominated commercial publishing, but successful poets like Tennyson or Longfellow outsold novelists. Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1858), for example,

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sold over a quarter of a million copies. Children still memorized and recited famous poems as a central part of the curriculum. Newspapers printed or reprinted poems as a regular feature. Famous poets like Byron, Longfellow, or the Brownings enjoyed international celebrity. When Edison wanted to record the most famous voices in the English-speaking world, he approached Queen Victoria, Prime Minister Gladstone, and Tennyson. Meanwhile, Longfellow lived to see his birthday become a national holiday. Novelists commanded immense popularity, but only poets received such signal honors.

If technology had transformed the social identity of the poet, mass production also changed the cultural status of his or her manuscripts. The uniformity of machine-printed books slowly imbued the handwritten page with a unique personal aura. As mechanical typography visually standardized written language, the reader was less likely to view an autograph copy of a poem purely as a piece of verbal communication; it now became a unique artifact that invited a different sort of attention. Impersonal communication was the function of print; the manuscript suggested a more individual and direct relation between reader and author—not through its text but its medium, which resembled a private communication. The omnipresence of mechanical print made the manuscript's medium its most important message.

The special value of a literary manuscript, therefore, does not come solely from the words it contains; the text can usually be found elsewhere in printed form. In purely functional terms—legibility, endurance, portability, and perhaps even accuracy—a book is usually more useful than an autograph. The manuscript's superior value originates, to use Walter Benjamin's term from "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in its "aura"—"its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be." A modern book is a standardized manufactured object; a copy in Chicago does not differ from those in Santa Rosa, Gainesville, or Johannesburg. A manuscript, however, not only exists as a unique entity whose total essence cannot be fully reproduced; it also survives as a historical artifact that can be traced back to its creator. A modern edition of Byron's *Don Juan,* for instance, provides an authentic verbal and intellectual link between the past and present, but it does not

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possess the unreproducible and unsummarizable aura of total authenticity that the original manuscript does.

Benjamin had worried that the mass reproduction of artworks led to their desacralization by destroying the aura of the original. His theory may or may not accurately pertain to the visual arts like painting where there is an identifiable original, but it proves problematic in literature. If someone asks a group of art historians where the original of Piero della Francesca's *The Flagellation* is located, they can confidently agree that it is to be found in the Galleria at Urbino. But if a group of literary scholars were asked where the original of *Hamlet* is found, they would not only be unable to say *where* it is, they would probably be unable to agree on *what* the original is—a modern scholarly text, a First Folio, a great performance, a lost acting version used by Shakespeare's company, a collective idea of *Hamlet* among all theatergoers?

The mode of existence for literary works is a complex and perhaps insoluble problem. Mechanical reproduction, however, paradoxically provided an answer at least for the common reader. As developments of commercial printing in the eighteenth century turned books from luxury goods to commonplace objects, mass production may have indeed desacralized the book, but it did not destroy the magical aura of the literary work, only transferred it. The proliferation of printed books gradually created a new type of original—the author's manuscript, endowed with an aura of authenticity and authority by the hand of its creator.

The manuscript of a literary work became more than words; it represented a direct and unmediated physical link between viewer and author—a holy relic or shamanistic fetish. When Larkin, the most level-headed of poets, exclaims, "This is the paper he wrote on, these are the words as he wrote them, emerging for the first time in this particular miraculous combination," he reveals the long-term results of the new attitude—the frisson of devotional ecstasy, a sense of the sacred. This quality of untransferable authenticity explains why even the fragment of a great work (like the Morgan's fragment of *Paradise Lost*) possesses magical value far in excess of its scholarly contents. Philosophers may deride this subjective notion of communication with some justification; as an analytical method, it is overtly flawed. Yet who can deny that one learns something in such transactions—often something essential? Why else do scholars and biographers

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assiduously study manuscripts? Any reflective person recognizes how much learning happens outside the realm of analytical deduction. Most of what one knows comes from sensory, intuitive, and imaginative faculties. Reason may later examine and organize this learning, but one first assimilated it holistically.

The scholarly alibi of libraries that they acquire literary manuscripts for intellectual reasons, therefore, is inadequate at best. Those needs could be better served by microfilm or photocopies at a negligible fraction of the expense. Textual information can usually be found both more easily and completely in a variorum edition. Like the intricately rational web of theology woven around the irrational mysteries of faith, the sober explanations of institutions for hoarding literary relics seem like elegant *post-factum* justifications for what is essentially a sense of sacred awe. An institution of learning seeks significant manuscripts because they possess qualities that scholarship cannot entirely reproduce—an authentic, holistic connection with the great writers of the past. It is not the intellectual content of the manuscript that is important but its material presence—ink spots, tobacco stains, pinworm holes, and foxing included.

The magical nature of the author's hand can be seen perhaps most clearly in signed books—a special case in which handwriting and mechanical typography meet. An autographed and an unsigned copy of the same title have no significant difference in content except for a bit of ink across one page, but the autographed volume will usually sell at many times the price of the other copy. Bearing the mark that it once rested in the author's hands, the autographed volume is transformed from a mere book into a minor relic. Before the nineteenth century owners signed their books mostly for two reasons—to prevent theft or to inscribe them as a gift. Alexander Pope's copy of Milton's *Poems* in the Berg, for example, bears its former owner's signature, not Milton's, and the presentation copy of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) was inscribed by the poet only because he gave it to a patroness. The notion of a stranger soliciting Pope to sign a copy of *The Rape of the Lock* would have seemed peculiar to the Augustan poet. Midway in the following century, however, it was so common for strangers to ask writers to autograph books that it proved a great nuisance to established poets. The autograph had become print culture's means of individuating mass-produced

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books by linking them with the author's person. Literary autograph collecting reached its peak at the turn of the century when Rudyard Kipling discovered that shopkeepers would rather keep a small check with his signature than cash it—true fame.

The autographed book exists as a midpoint between the anonymous nature of the manufactured book and the unique personal essence of the manuscript. If a book contains sufficient authorial additions, however, it gains the unique aura of the working draft. In Coleridge's copy of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) now in the Berg, the poet has revised the printed text of his poems. "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere" is covered with many significant additions, deletions, and revisions. The book has become a working draft. In the Berg's copy of Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847) the poet has added several new short lyrics to his long didactic poem. These 1850 additions, which include "The Splendor Falls" and "Sweet and Low," now rank among his most popular poems. Sometimes one man's book became another man's manuscript. Coventry Patmore covered the margins of his copy of *The Princess* with a running commentary on Tennyson's poem—half praise, half criticism. Patmore's marginalia provide the modern reader with a vivid sense of how the best Victorian poets read one another's work. Consulting with Siegfried Sassoon, poet Edmund Blunden covered his copy of Robert Graves's memoir, *Goodbye to All That* (1929), with their copious disagreements concerning the author's account of events; their commentary effectively recomposes the printed monologue into an argumentative dialogue in manuscript. Dissatisfied with Winifred Roy's translation of his novel *Despair*, Nabokov reworked her version phrase by phrase writing his more forceful and accurate English between the lines of the printed text. Now in the Berg, this book-*cum*-manuscript provides a vivid demonstration of Nabokov's practice both as novelist and translator. Perhaps the most extravagant case of "recomposition" on record appears in Andrew Motion's biography of Philip Larkin. The librarian poet and his longtime girlfriend, Monica Sinclair, spent years "systematically defacing" and comically rewriting a copy of Iris Murdoch's 1956 novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, until they had transformed word by word nearly 300 pages into a pornographic farce. Fate has a sense of humor: this singular literary artifact now rests in the special collections of the Brynmor Jones, Larkin's own library.

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Contemporary readers customarily assume the division between book and manuscript to be clear and absolute. The manuscript is a private object whereas the book serves a public function. Earlier ages, however, would not have seen so neat a distinction. Before the invention of moveable type, of course, such a split was impossible; manuscripts were the sole means of literary transmission—public or private. Yet even after the commercialization of printing, manuscript culture remained a powerful force in literary life, especially among the upper classes. John Donne never published any poems except for his two *Anniversaries* (1611 and 1612), and even these short books done for the sake of patronage embarrassed him immensely. (Donne did not even keep handwritten copies of all his poems. When pressured by a patron in 1614 to collect his verse in manuscript, he had to write friends for copies eventually complaining that it cost him "more diligence to seek them than it did to make them.")

Donne's attitude toward publication was not unusual. Many Renaissance poets such as Andrew Marvell, Thomas Carew, Sir John Suckling, Sir Henry Wotton, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke allowed their work to circulate only in manuscript among a coterie audience. Active pursuit of publication seemed *déclassé* and was left to hack rhymesters or ambitious parvenus like Ben Johnson. The gentry did not willingly allow their work to appear in print although their coterie readers might recopy favorite poems (often without authorial credit) into their own commonplace books. Not until Milton's time was it customary for a poem to go directly from an author's desk to the printer.

The distinction between private and public audiences is also blurred in printed books. Fine presses customarily publish volumes in small editions—rarely much above two hundred and often fewer than two dozen. Like Elizabethan aristocratic manuscripts, these modern *éditions de luxe* serve a coterie audience and occupy an interesting middle ground between private and public readership. There are also sometimes books printed in tiny editions intended only for private reading. Robert Frost had just two copies struck of his first collection, *Twilight* (1894)—one for himself, the other for Elinor White whom he later married. In a fit of romantic despair, the young poet destroyed his own copy. Elinor was more prudent, and the sole copy of *Twilight* now survives in the University of Virginia's Frost Collection.

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That the magic value of manuscripts surpasses their meaningful value can be further attested by the passion both private collectors and public institutions exercise in obtaining the personal effects of famous writers. In addition to Mrs. Browning's slippers, Dickens' desk, and Thackeray's pen, the Berg Collection possesses such modern relics as W. H. Auden's suitcase, Randall Jarrell's library card, E. E. Cummings' death mask, and Howard Moss's pencil sharpener. The auction prices for literary artifacts may be lower than for Marilyn Monroe or Elvis Presley memorabilia, but—the prestige of possession aside—the underlying motivations to acquire them are equally irrational and superstitious. The new owners hope mysteriously to gain some part of the original celebrity's power or allure.

Medieval towns once competed for the bodies of saints to protect their citizens from plagues and natural disasters. (One still sees the waxy cadavers of the blessed in the churches of Southern Europe—displayed behind glass like rare manuscripts in a library exhibition.) If the physical remains of saints were unavailable, then their personal effects would suffice. Cloaks, missals, rosaries, belts, and shoe leather were all to be cherished for their talismanic power. While Northern Protestants ridiculed this Southern Catholic custom, they did not escape its primal attraction; they merely translated it into secular terms. The remains of great poets were buried in Westminster Abbey; their personal effects and manuscripts were collected by libraries. Although there seems to be no commercial traffic in the bones of poets, Tennyson once claimed that dealers would have sold his toenail parings had they gotten hold of them. None of the esteemed Laureate's clippings has been preserved for posterity, but locks of his hair still exist. There are, in fact, many private and institutional collectors of literary hair. The Berg, for example, owns two locks of Whitman's famous gray mane.

Manuscripts also represent the imagination's passport; they allow the viewer to travel from the public and impersonal world of mechanical typography into the private, human world of the author—from literature as an institution to literature as friendship. A book is a public object collectively produced by many hands and designed for many readers; in contrast, even a typewritten draft seems intimate and individual. The manuscript—handwritten or typed—invites the viewer to step from the

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faceless crowd of readers and become an individual. It is tempting to portray manuscripts as objects of aesthetic contemplation, and the elegant fair copies of poets like Poe, Longfellow, or Keats reward such attention, but the intrinsic beauty of a charm is no measure of its magic. *Reliquaria* must be beautiful, not the relics. For this reason foul copies often provide as much or more pleasure than fair copies; in the corrections, deletions, fragments, dead ends, and doodling, one discovers the author's humanity. Kipling and Cummings sometimes playfully illustrated their manuscripts and letters. Anne Sexton's triumphant "Sold to New Yorker" scrawled at the top of a typescript poem lets the viewer share the author's pride and pleasure. If the magnificence of the finished work excites our aesthetic imagination, the imperfections of the working drafts allow our participation.

One suspects that Shakespeare's status has only been enhanced by the absence of manuscripts; he remains Olympian and behind his masterpieces. Among the well-documented moderns, Stevens has deepened the mystery surrounding his inner life by leaving no working drafts of mature poems. Perhaps the special appeal of final manuscripts and fair copies is that they provide the most direct comparisons between the private and public identities of the poet; they present more or less the same words one already knows from the printed page. If the words are identical between a manuscript and a printed text, then what one notices are the non-verbal aspects like the handwriting, paper, number of deletions or additions, even the stains—all the clues of the author's physical presence. Final manuscripts reveal the juncture between the secret realm of poetic inspiration and the external existence of the printed text.

The study of literary manuscripts also suggests the complex but vital connections between poetry and technology. In the visual arts the impact of technical innovation like lost-wax casting, oil-based paints, color lithography, or daguerreotype constitutes an essential part of a medium's history. In literary studies, however, poetry is mostly seen as pure language generated by the writer's imagination in relation to the tradition. Scholars may study the economics and technology of publishing to understand the social identity of the poet, but the most intimate relation between technology and poetic composition remains largely unexplored, except by general theorists like Marshall McLuhan,

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Walter Ong, or Eric Havelock. Does anyone know, for example, the first significant poet to compose on a typewriter?

Only six years separate the composition of W. B. Yeats's 1917 volume, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, and William Carlos Williams' 1923 collection, *Spring and All*, which contains his famous "The Red Wheelbarrow," but the impact of technological change is already apparent. The Berg's copy of Yeats's manuscript exists only in the author's swift, strong hand. In 1917 Yeats still did not use a typewriter. His method of composition remained oral, aural, and manual—a scribal method not appreciably different from the procedures of Virgil, Dante, or Donne. Yeats never wrote a poem that did not rhyme. The forceful meter, symmetrical stanzas, and overt musicality of his verse not only demonstrate his mastery of traditional prosody but also his commitment to shaping poems in sonic terms. Perhaps Yeats's only technological advantage over Virgil is inexpensive paper, which allows him to take each poem through numerous drafts.

Six years after Yeats's book, however, what constitutes a poem in technical terms has broadened enormously. Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" exists primarily not as sounds moving through time but as words visually fixed in space. Like "The Wild Swans at Coole," Williams' typographic poem displays strict order and symmetry. There is no rhyme or meter, but each stanza contains an identical pattern of four words arranged in combinations of three and one.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Critics often celebrate Williams as the poet of natural American speech, but the visual technique of "The Red Wheelbarrow"

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deliberately subverts normal speech rhythms. By breaking the poem's single short sentence into eight shaped lines surrounded by the white space of a blank page, Williams forces the reader to slow down normal speech into the static visual rhythm of the poem. It is no coincidence that Williams kept a typewriter in his office to write between patients when a paper and pen would have been more convenient. Cummings also systematically explored visual features of typography that have no exact equivalents in speech—lower- and upper-case letters, visual symbols (like &, $, and %), Arabic and Roman numbers, punctuation, spacing and abbreviation. For good reason the Berg preserves his Royal typewriter along with his papers. The keyboard was integral to his creative process.

A literary manuscript allows the viewer to probe—however subjectively or inadequately—the mystery of artistic genius. If it is a great manuscript, it invites one to observe an author at a moment when he or she performed at the limits of human possibility. The printed text may allow one to view that performance from the stadium stand, but the manuscript puts one at the author's side. Here, as so often in the arts, there is a powerful element of voyeurism.

The urge to see the author face to face is not merely fandom; it is a deep-rooted, primitive human desire. The physical separation of the poet from the audience is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of human history the audience heard the poet's physical voice; a direct physical relationship was unavoidable in pre-literate societies. Even after the introduction of the phonetic alphabet, which allowed writing to preserve the text of poems, the links with oral culture remained. In Roman times a poet "published" his work by reading it aloud to an invited audience. Later troubadours and minnesingers sang or recited their poems. Handmade books were rare and expensive; and the connection between poetry and oral presentation was an unbroken tradition from time immemorial. Only the introduction of printed books fully separated the living poet from his or her audience. The age of typography amounts to a small portion of total human existence—three or four centuries out of perhaps a million years.

The popularity of poetry readings is a reminder of the strong aural and tribal roots of poetry. Readings bring an audience into a direct physical relationship with the author—and momentarily form a tribe of like-minded listeners versus isolated readers. This longing for personal—and non-verbal—knowledge of the poet is

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also found in the now common practice of dust-jacket photos. Handwritten manuscripts satisfy the same desire in readers. The author's hand provides both a direct human link and a suggestive invitation to the viewer's imagination. Graphology may be only a pseudoscience, but it rests on a genuine insight: there is some essential connection between handwriting and character. The mere fact that the connections cannot be standardized does not invalidate them. Different aspects of the writer's personality emerge in different hands, and the penmanship of the same person may shift noticeably according to mood. Biographer Edmund Morris has described handwriting's special ability to communicate the inner state of its author:

> Script's primary power is to convey the cursive flow of human thought, from brain to hand to pen to ink to eye—every waver, every loop, every character trembling with expression. Type has no comparable warmth.

Examining the manuscripts of famous poets, one is often struck by how clearly some aspect of their character emerges in the handwriting. Poe's conspicuously beautiful hand reveals the same sensibility that articulated his dreamy aestheticism. Dickinson's eccentric script enlarges the letters so that a short poem sprawls across an entire page—one or two words stretching from margin to margin. Can there be any doubt the author is insisting on the outsize importance of her words? "Don't mistake my short poem for a small poem," the handwriting shouts. Is anyone surprised that Longfellow has neater handwriting than Whitman? Or that Keats wrote with more deliberate care than Byron whose quick, vertical hand dashes dramatically across the page?

The value our culture has placed on literary manuscripts reflects an admirable and ineradicable human impulse—the desire for a direct and authentic relation between art and its audience. Literature may be an institution, an imaginary library too vast and labyrinthine for any single reader to explore entirely, but the experience of studying great manuscripts reminds the viewer that each individual work is also a conversation, an imaginative and emotional transaction from one person to another, a bridge across time and place. Reading is never more intimate than with script. The hand of the poet reaches out to greet the reader.

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BERT O. STATES

The Death of a Finch

One afternoon, when I was either eight or nine and living in the village of Albion just outside Punxsutawney, it came to pass (and not for the first time) that I threw a large rock at a robin foraging too busily in my back yard. To my utter shock the rock struck the bird squarely on the back and in a quivering instant it was dead. What I remember of the feeling produced by this event is a sense of shame, terrible immediate guilt (as when I was caught pocketing my uncle Tom's groundhog watch fob), confusion, and possibly, *just* possibly, a rudimentary tincture of the most profound of all emotions—grief—which I could not yet have known at first hand. I would guess that that part of the feeling, unless I am misremembering it, could be best described as the emotional foundation out of which grief arises, something necessary to know in order to feel grief, but not grief itself. To me grief is the strangest of the so-called "base-level" emotions, primarily because it runs the scale from violence to torpor. The precondition for it is love or a strong affectional value placed on something, and this was certainly not the case with the robin. Simply put, grief is the overwhelming awareness of loss; but more complexly it is the result of one's discovery that time flows in one direction only, a truth that is normally masked by the animation with which everything living continues to remain itself. For everything that is valued is valued as a sort of instant history of itself: mother is always dependably mother, summer is always a time when there is no school, the robin dependably hops in furious bursts over the lawn (and is therefore very hard to hit with a rock or a slingshot), and so on. All things continue to be themselves, and thanks to this wonderful persistence there is a fair amount of security in life. The cancer of grief finds its natural host in this all too vulnerable zone of comfort, and at the highest possible stake. For once life is out of a living thing it cannot be called back, and in that realization the tranquility of a lifetime of

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safety is temporarily shattered and permanently put on notice. I threw the rock, thoughtlessly, at a creature I neither resented nor understood and had my first exquisite awareness of how the value of all things rides on the current of an indifferent causal order.

During the time in late May of 1994 when my sister Lois was dying in Monterey, a process that required some seven weeks, I had no dreams about her or about anything I can construe as being related to the likelihood of losing her. I don't know why this was the case but it leads to an interesting speculation that dreams do not haul coal to Newcastle; that is, they are somehow guided by a principle of clemency, or more realistically, simple redundancy: the sponge stops absorbing water when it is full; too much is too much; there is no need to dream of grief in the midst of grief, and so on. There is a good deal of research to the contrary suggesting that dreams are either direct or displaced reflections of our problems and moods and my own dreams bear this out on a regular basis. However, I am referring mainly to situations of what we may call higher magnitude and the period of my sister's long coma and death was one of the highest in my life. Such situations, in my experience, find their way into dreams only gradually, if at all, and it may be that the magnitude of the situation insulates us from the additional pain of a dream, somewhat as shock temporarily insulates the body against pain following an extreme insult. There is probably no dependable theory one can sort out, but for the most part dreams seem to concentrate on more common sorts of frustration or desire, like getting lost in the city or solving a problem left dangling from the day. This was a fact noticed by psychologists long before Freud in whose hands it led to the most famous and enduring theory of dreams: that these trivial images were only the censored displacements of the real problems.

Despite all this, however, I couldn't help wondering about the absence of dreams of my sister during this period, and in an odd way, being a student of dreams, I looked forward to the first dream in which she would appear. What would it be about? How would my dreamwork deal with her illness, and at length (when in the fifth week we knew it was inevitable) her death? To put it another way, how would I handle the occasion in this other reality I inhabit nightly? As it turns out I didn't have long to wait. Two nights after her death, when I had returned to Santa Barbara

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from Monterey, I had a dream in which I was running along a path toward a house where some friends were having an afternoon gathering. All I remember about the foregoing part of the dream is that it was pleasantly social: people, activity, houses, open country, and so on, and I was joining the group with great anticipation. Then suddenly, on a path parallel to my own, slightly below it, I saw a finch speeding along on the ground in the opposite direction, much like the Roadrunner in the cartoon. It was a brilliant green-yellow color, as delicate as a Christmas ornament, and it seemed mechanically propelled. Inexplicably, I found a large pebble in my hand and I tossed it back over my head, almost aimlessly, in the bird's direction. No sooner was the pebble in flight than I conceived the consequence, and I shouted, "No!" But the bird was already crying aloud in pain; the pebble had cleanly severed one of its wings and it was vainly flapping the other wing in a pathetic effort to right itself. I now saw that the bird was made of flesh and that there was no undoing the damage I had done. It was an unbearable moment. I began to howl, and I felt precisely what I had felt two days earlier at the hospital in the final twenty minutes of Lois' life.

Before this dream, I had not thought about the robin incident for many years, but it came back to me the instant I woke up, almost before the dream had run its course. There, suddenly, was the dead robin, exhumed from memory intact, as if it had been waiting all this time for the occasion to re-appear. If I held any beliefs of the sort, I would say it was taking its revenge. In any case, it took only a moment more to relate the dream to my sister's death. Here, then, was the first dream. She hadn't appeared in it, but beyond any doubt the three things were inescapably fused—the robin, the finch, and my sister (wreathed in birds), all condensed into a dream whose actual "plot" bore no similarity to my experience at the hospital. But, as Freud has often said, the only trustworthy things about our dreams are what we think and say about them when we wake up. I'm not sure I believe this, but I am also not sure that the dream is over when you wake up. So we have here a kind of classic dream problem: Why the "displacement"? What was the finch doing in my dream? Why should I not have dreamed directly of my sister? Or of a robin? And what has the death of my sister—if all this is plausible—to do with both bird incidents provoking my guilt and shame?

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To look at the latter question first (because it interests me the least): I think the element of guilt has rather conventional origins in this case. I felt no guilt for my sister's death in the sense of the direct responsibility I plainly bore in the case of the robin incident and the finch dream. Lois has been one of the strongest forces in my life; we have always had a kind of "Siamese" intimacy, beginning in my birth on August 8, 1929—her tenth birthday—and proceeding through scores of long letters written during periods of separation, culminating in her gift of a photo album of my "Life and Times" in 1989 in which the opening sentence of her introduction reads: "When you came into my life on my very own tenth birthday, it was required that I keep track of you." Still, even in such positive cases guilt finds its natural place in the death vigil. One of the feelings I steadily experienced during my time at the hospital arose from the simple truth that *my* sister was doing the dying, not I, and in the presence of such a devastating event, one feels a kind of dumb shame at being free to come and go, to breathe unfrantically, to pass the time by talking, pacing, reading a book or taking a lunch break in the cafeteria, and even the luxury of boredom. Add to this the obvious sense of helplessness, which expresses itself in continual efforts to make the dying one more comfortable, to fluff the pillow, cool the brow, sponge the lips, or to spend long hours in the attitude of vigil, beyond any practical use (other than "being there"), and to bring one's thoughts always, always, back to the grim business of dying following, say, an interval of family levity (a curious feature of the death vigil is the number of jokes that get told). In short, it seems wrong to carry on as usual, though the wrongness has nothing to do with responsibility. It has rather to do with the luck of the draw. And then there is probably an overlay of personal regret at all the past insufficiencies (the disagreements, neglects, things promised but not done) and the feeling that things could always have been better between us, or that I might have appreciated her more, had there been time when I wasn't so busy, and of course now the time has run out. So: guilt feeds on guilt. Anyway, all of these thoughts, fleeting or otherwise, are there in different ways and different proportions, I suppose, in each watcher. They are coaxed out of us by the extremity of the event itself which of course allows generous time for retrospection, none for improvement. And over all else, there

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is the unanswerable authority that is visible only in the damage being done before your eyes: death, being our only true experience of apocalypse, sweeps everything (including jokes) into its process, as into the funnel of a maelstrom.

Anyway, if there is any connection between the finch dream and the hospital scene, beyond the emotional consequence, it probably lies along some such lines. If there is more, I don't want to know about it.

Thinking about all this now from some emotional distance, I find other questions more interesting: why the displacement in the dream from my sister to the green finch? Why did I not simply dream of my sister (as my niece Leslie had the night before Lois' death)? Had the dream repressed its true content and offered, as they say, a "compromise formation"? I don't know that psychoanalysis would suggest this as the cause of the displacement. But it is the logical place to begin: if one assumes that something should otherwise have appeared, is there not reason to suspect it has been repressed?

This idea seems to me completely wrong. I have never put much stock in the notion that dreams are repressive mechanisms. On the contrary, my own experience suggests that dreams are more likely to undo the tapestries of repression that we weave so successfully during the day. Or to put it in a more neutral light: dreams are indifferent to barriers we erect around unpleasant or fearful thoughts. Of course, psychiatrists would probably want to know what business I had in saying what I have and haven't repressed. But more particularly, I am unable to see that much has been repressed, assuming we think of repression as the censorship of unpleasant or violent feelings. In a certain sense, one might say that the actual image of my sister had been repressed, but this assumes that the dream was about my sister rather than about something else. The feeling of grief was certainly not repressed, and if not the feeling, why its object? How could dreaming of the object (my sister) have made the feeling even more painful, or dreaming about the finch less painful than it might otherwise have been? Pain is pain. So if I hadn't dreamed of my sister I certainly experienced, or *re*-experienced, the full emotional effect of her death, and what can be the difference, since I immediately made the connection on waking? Indeed, so clear was the connection to me, on emerging from the dream into

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the so-called hypnopompic state, that it seems academic to separate the dream from the waking realization.

Why, then, the finch? To trace this image to a possible source, one would have to know more about thinking and consciousness than we are likely to know for a long time. My chief skepticism about dream interpretation in general is that it is motivated primarily by a search for a meaning of which the dream is supposed to be a symptom, as if the dream were a form of deficient or cryptic communication that could have done better had there been no "hidden" intention to be accommodated. What is missing from most interpretation is a sense of the complexity of mind environment, the inexhaustibility of the sources of mental imagery, and the very good possibility that a dream is a confluence of energies far more diverse than any analysis could possibly determine—indeed, as complicated as consciousness itself. I suspect that dreams are more like telephone trunk lines, over which many messages are passing simultaneously, than they are like a simple telephone conversation. Overall, I suppose one might claim that the image of the finch, like the flying birds in one of the dreams Freud treats, captures a certain quality of the death experience, the flight of life from the body metaphorically equated with the loss of the finch's wing and its certain death. But this seems suspiciously like "poetic" thinking which attributes to the dream an interest in nuance of the sort that delights us in art, as if dreams had the time or inclination to conjure effective metaphors to please the waking. I can see no evidence for dreams indulging in such elegant symbolism. For one thing, there is no need for symbols of this sort (or for that matter, symbols of any sort) in dreams: dreams deal in equivalencies and resemblances, never in disguises, and if these turn out to be amenable to symbolic analysis, in the literary or psychoanalytic sense of the term, that is something the dream couldn't care less about.

I think the finch got into the dream on very different grounds. For one thing, the finch was a small section in a series of more or less pleasant dreams of the same night that had to do with a number of people and interconnected places. I have forgotten the other particulars (and this in itself puts us beyond any hope of a clear explanation), but the finch came into the dream only as I was running along the path. It too was running (not flying)

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along the path, but in the opposite direction. However, it turns out that there is something like a smoking gun that might more directly account for the finch: within the very week of the dream our cat Abby had brought a freshly killed bird into the living room. If this sounds like solid evidence for the finch's presence on the scene I must add that this is an all too frequent occurrence, it being our fate to enjoy both birds and cats who do not enjoy each other. Still, it is a likely possibility. But finding a dead finch from a recent day residue doesn't solve the problem of the relation of the finch to my sister's death. I think the problem comes in treating the finch as a displacement, rather than as an image in its own right.

My own guess is that the dream was no more about my sister's death than it was about the death of the finch. This argument has nothing to do with a priority of values but with what I take to be the conditions under which dreams select and combine images and thoughts. If there is a latent content beneath the dream it is the total emotional history I have only partially outlined here, though in the interest of simplicity it does seem plausible that the finch, having arrived on the scene through whatever provocation, then served as the trip-switch and conductor of an emotional excess that had charged my life in recent weeks. This "excess" very likely had no place to cathect itself (as Freud would say) in this particular dream prior to the finch's appearance. But once it entered the dream the finch must somehow have revived a memory of the robin episode, and suddenly, from the finch came the pebble, from the pebble the disaster, and from the disaster the reprise of my grief.

The one certainty about dreams is that the feelings always get through cleanly, though they may be attached to objects and creatures that have little connection, symbolic or otherwise, to the feeling's probable sources. This is even the case with ambivalent feelings: however complex or self-contradictory, they are finally clean feelings, since the confusion of contradiction is a feeling in its own right. So what we have is seeming distortion and confusion on the level of the image; absolute clarity on the level of the emotion—insofar as emotions can be called clear. All of which leads me to suspect that my finch was not a surrogate or a displacement of my sister, but a *variation*, and that her death, crass as it may seem to say it, was a variation of the robin incident

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in my back yard fifty-five years earlier. What I mean is that dreams are not about things, events, or people; they are, to the best of our knowledge, about emotions and attitudes, which have a certain structure and portability. Emotions are timeless: they survive their occurrence in specific events and they are subject to re-arousal. "Yes," you might say, "but our emotions are never free-floating; they are always fused with things, events, and people. One does finally care more about one's sister than about a finch."

This argument misses a possibility that seems to me borne out of the finch dream. It was not necessary that I dream of my sister in order to express what her death emotionally meant to me. There is a sense in which dreaming of a green finch or dreaming of my sister comes to the same end. But what her death meant to me, the terrible grief of the event, was inextricably mixed with the death of the robin, the deaths (in due course) of my grandfather and my father and mother, various aunts and uncles, my boyhood friend John Staikides at the age of forty-five, several colleagues and friends over the years, the deaths of a series of spoiled and much-loved cats, the death of a nine-year-old boy I had never met who was killed while playing on the street in front of the house my son had sold his parents (his first real estate "closure") on the very day they moved in, and so on. To put all these griefs together, irrespective of species or closeness of relationship, is not to devalue any of them in the least. Among many other things, I am a history of grieving, and no single grief can be isolated or finally distinguished from other griefs, though some griefs are easier to bear and more short-lived than others. In short, to embody the affect of grief in an image is to open the whole box of one's grief. What emerges, then, is not grief only for this or that, but Grief incarnate in a single image—grief that death is the terminus of all experience.

I would like to put this idea in a somewhat less analytical way by looking briefly at the relationship of dreams and art as two things the human mind does with its stored experience. The common denominator is that in our encounter with both art and dreams we are often moved to very powerful emotions. Emotions aroused by art are often called fictional emotions. This is a woefully misleading term. It doesn't mean that the emotions are false, or partial, or illusory in the sense that they don't genuinely affect the nervous system to the point of real tears, laughter, or anger. It

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means only that the characters, events, or images that provoke them are themselves unreal, and therefore beyond the emotion there is always the awareness that the stakes are also unreal. This is what makes it possible to enjoy painful emotions aroused by artworks, though the same emotion caused by an event in daily life might be unbearable. So art offers a built-in circuit regulator whereby the quality of the emotion is purely felt but its empirical grounding is shunted off into impersonal soil and compromised, a little as our concern for aerialists is compromised by their performing over a net. The emotions aroused by dreams are obviously not of this kind, since there is no dream awareness that what is happening isn't really happening. The episode of the finch was as real and emotionally intensive as the death of my sister, though hardly as prolonged. For dreams contain still another kind of circuit regulator, or more properly a circuit breaker: when the emotion becomes unmanageable, the dreamer awakens and realizes that "it has all been a dream"—in short, a self-created fiction.

Perhaps an instance would bring this out of the abstract. For me, one of the most moving passages in poetry is the line King Lear speaks over the body of his daughter Cordelia at the end of the play. It doesn't evoke its proper feeling out of the flow of the play, but for the record it reads: "Thou'lt come no more, / Never, never, never, never, never." It is probably not an accident that I should choose a passage that was an expression of grief, grief being the most moving emotion in real life and therefore one of the most moving emotions that can be produced by art. The truth is, for decades I've recited this line aloud while driving or pacing the floor in a frustrated effort to see how such simplicity can bear so much emotional weight. It has much to do with the weak quality of the verb "come," which works in the line much as "be" works in Hamlet's "To be or not to be," as opposed to some firmer or more edgy verb like "live" or "exist." It carries the weight of all the ways in which a loved person or thing *comes* to us. Finally, there is the incomparable redundancy of the "nevers," the five coffin nails, as I call them, about which I will say no more, except that they are an unpassable trap for mediocre actors.

All of this is so much lit crit, and I go into it here with some reservation and hope that it won't be taken in that vein. I don't know what makes the line so clean and unimprovable, but over

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the years it has become an important part of the history of grief I've been speaking about here. And it was these words that I spoke to myself in a barely audible voice at my sister's bedside just before the end. My god, you may think, don't critics ever stop? My only defense is that I am not a religious person and it was the best in the way of prayer I could manage; it came to me as naturally in the hospital as the 23rd Psalm came to my brother-in-law Mel, who was standing next to me, and as easily as I believe the finch came to me in my dream. The experiences are different in many ways, but I think all of them illustrate a deep creatural need to put any strong experience into its broadest possible dimensions. For instance, it is quite noticeable that a death vigil is imbued with the kind of economy that you find in poetry. There is (dare I say it?) a certain beauty in the spareness of the proceedings, in the mannerisms of people, their movements, voice patterns and levels, all owing perhaps to the profound inappropriateness of excess, noise, and the random, and most especially to the unrelieved focus of the occasion. Is this simply respect for Death? Or has it to do with the need to throw against death what equivalence one can muster? In the face of death, as Shakespeare's Count tells us, we must be absolute, free from relativity and specification, conditionless. Language is the opposite of these things, except for the language of poetry which is sprung free somehow of the business of fussing about *things*. Moreover, I suspect that the prayers people speak in the presence of death belong as much to the province of poetry as to religion. To put it another way, prayer has as much to do with the metrical qualities of poetry ("The Lord is my shepherd . . .") as it does with the respect for the deity. And the chief service that poetry and prayer perform is to put some order, balance, and beauty on an otherwise voiceless experience.

Finally, to return to my finch and *King Lear*, what to make, if anything, of the fact that at the head of this same scene as they are being led off to prison, Lear compares Cordelia and himself to two birds in a cage? I don't know what possible connection this remote image has with the finch of my dream. It sounds to me ingenious and I'm not trying to sneak it in under the cover of my own skepticism. But is it any more remote than my robin episode? It stands to reason that there is an order and priority in the selection process whereby the possible next image of the dream

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(or a poem) is brought forth from the deep well of associated memories. It stands to reason, too, that the dreaming brain discovers its images, unearths them suddenly, at the speed of light, as opposed to having them all together beforehand, like pigments set out on a palette. For the peculiarity of the dream is that it has no time to look for its images. In any case, I have no interest in interpreting my dream, or in pinning down its sources, only in understanding what may forever be beyond understanding: how that astonishing sequence of images came about, out of what close and distant grace notes of recall, how something of such magnitude as this grief can ride on the flow of such fragile connections. Is it possible that if the line—"We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage"—were not in *King Lear*, or in my memory of *King Lear*, my dream might have been different, that there might have been no finch?

There is one other example that seems to fit into this discussion by way of summary, and it gets into this meditation for reasons that will be immediately apparent. One of my favorite poems is Richard Wilbur's "The Death of a Toad,"[1] which reads as follows:

A toad the power mower caught,
Chewed and clipped of a leg, with a hobbling hop has got
To the garden verge, and sanctuaried him
Under the cineraria leaves, in the shade
Of the ashen heartshaped leaves, in a dim,
Low, and final glade.

The rare original heartsblood goes,
Spends on the earthen hide, in the folds and wizening, flows
In the gutters of the banked and staring eyes. He lies
As still as if he would return to stone,
And soundlessly attending, dies
Toward some deep monotone,

Toward misted and ebullient seas
And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.
Day dwindles, drowning, and at length is gone

[1] "The Death of a Toad," from *Ceremony and Other Poems*, copyright © 1950 and renewed 1978 by Richard Wilbur, reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace & Company.

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In the wide and antique eyes, which still appear
To watch, across the castrate lawn,
The haggard daylight steer.

I have no idea what inspired Wilbur to write this poem, but we can be sure that he didn't record all this by objectively observing the behavior of a real dying toad. Like all poetry, it is infused with the poet's own soul, to speak anachronistically; it is humanized, like the cloud in Shelley's poem. To my certain knowledge, I saw no such thing in the eye of the robin fifty-five years ago, lying "as still as if he would return to stone." But I see it now in my mind's eye, thanks to poems like Wilbur's and a considerable experience in death. So in a certain respect, one might say that the emotion is there, in the object before us, which we see through the eyes of the poet. But what I find so moving in the poem is not the humanization of the toad, Wilbur's seeing the toad as having "human" qualities, or our translation of the toad into a symbol of human death, but how much sympathy the poem arouses for something that is not of our kind. In short, the toad is not a metaphor; it is a toad, a creature with which we can have no vocal or emotional commerce, a lost amphibian eternally beyond our understanding. There is no way to know the toad. Yet the toad dies *too*. The blood is spent, the breath comes in dwindling jerks, the same recognizable process of perdition. The feat of the poem is to allow us, in the only language humans can understand, to see in the toad the ontological kinship of all dying things. This is the point at which species becomes an unnecessary category, or perhaps the point where all species come together as part of the same predictable journey of the protoplasm. The emotion Wilbur gets out of this brief death in the grass could not have been stronger had it been the death of a son, a daughter, or (to come to my point) a sister. All poets know that the "object of imitation" is utterly beside the point. It is what is seen in the object and got out of it that matters. And though there are many other differences between poems and dreams, this much holds true for both. The "trivial" images of dreams are no less expressive than the trivial images of art. The difference between art and dream is that art requires a true poet who has the skill to put "the best words in the best order," in Coleridge's famous phrase, in order to release the feeling to a person who listens; the dream, having no

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business in pleasing anyone, has only to find an image into which the emotional life of the dreamer can settle its inexhaustible density. The image is finally a place where the many converges in the one, an object, as it were, without boundaries that extends inevitably to the very edge of memory. It seems to me, then, that we shouldn't drive a wedge between the image and its emotional import by way of making it more like us than it is like itself, or in trying to de-trivialize it by making it a symbol for something more important. This is why I believe that my dream is finally a dream about the death of a finch provoked by the fresh and as yet unsettled, undreamt memory of my sister's death. The two become confused, as well they should, for they are variations of the same loss, and loss is finally what it is all about.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

All Sorts of Things

All sorts of things are done in the
provinces through boredom.
—Chekhov, "The Man in a Case"

He would stoop, pick up something,
look at it, and then
let it fall. The next afternoon
there he was again, walking slowly,
or stopping to examine

whatever it was he'd found.
I asked him, "What is it?"
He held out his hand. A stone.
He said, "It's almost perfect.
Look at it." And I did.

It was green, oval-shaped.
He showed me another . . .
reddish brown. There were many
like these. On other beaches
you could hardly find them at all.

*

I talked to Connie Fisher
who's in real estate and knows.
"That's Bill Mackay,"
she said. "He and his wife
moved here from New York.

He used to be in advertising
but now he's retired.
What he needs is a regular hobby,"
she said, "like golf or a boat.
The garden keeps me on my toes."

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In Country Houses

The man who was renting
the house next door, but living
apart from his wife, came back.

We heard what sounded like
a firecracker, and her voice
saying, "Put down that shotgun!"

Another shot. She shrieked.
The shriek became a continuing
high-pitched, keening sound.

Now he lies in the hospital
on a life-support system,
"brain dead" we've been told.

There is no way to find out
why the man tried to kill himself
from what we read in the paper.

Or the laughing weatherman
and the talk show at four:
"Husbands who have left their wives."

*

Everything is quiet now.
I recall something that a friend
once said: he spoke of "people

who live in country houses
at the end of drives."
I've often thought about them,

imagining what goes on
in some of those houses
in the silence of their lives.

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In the Twilight

Some of them must be seventy
if a day. Hardy veterans
of the war against old age.

One by one they vanish,
as rheumatism, aneurysm . . .
one of the many interesting ills

that flesh is heir to, takes them,
and they fall. But before they do
you will see them out on the road,

in the twilight, exercising:
geezers and codgers,
walkers and joggers,

the Texans at Gettysburg,
the Old Guard at Waterloo.
Caesar, we who are dying salute you.

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LYNNE McMAHON

Hubcaps Edging the Yard

Even in their former lives
they were inconsequent, a measure of protection
for the bolts that kept
the tires on,

kept rain and grit from the wells,
but beyond that, what? Ornamental in this
renascence, they line the yard
at Providence and Greed

keeping place with other icons,
tractor-tire geraniums and mile of pull-tab
chain stuck through with
tissue roses.

Someone must shine their silver faces.
Half-buried moons, half-moons now, they have
the forlorn allure of certain
1950s juvenile

delinquents whose crimes—
the prising off of hubcaps—have finally become
their own museum. Whatever
they once were,

barter and trade, the thrilling
version of bottlecaps and baseball cards, or, more
thrilling, evidence of joy
riding its own tabulation

into gang legend, they evoke
only token interest now. They've lost their place

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in the synecdoche. O Haloed Convexities!
Rain-slicked streets!

Outlaw selves of our desiring! No,
Larkin would leave them to their truer state,
not moon, not joy, not leather-jacketed
spoils. Not even man

revisiting his oily youth,
but wholesaler whose wife keeps a front yard garden,
whose shiny unexpectedness
keeps the birds away.

Peace Studies

Though he looks almost exactly the way
we thought he would, slightly grubby serape,
huaraches, the beard of a desert cenobite,
the voice of the guest speaker tonight
is surprisingly brisk and business-like,
few inflections, no gestures, not the least hint
of a power salute—a kind of revised prophet,
like Buddha in a suit, meant
to keep us on our spiritual toes.
Even the group of boys in back, taking
the class for an easy A, who, when called upon,
say the world is pretty much okay and besides,
they don't plan to live in Guatemala
or L.A. in any case—
even they have stopped unspiralling the wire
from their notebook page and fashioning tattoos.
The whole auditorium, in fact, is beginning
to look confused. Surely, at some point in his speech,
he'll begin the castigation? Our apathy, our anemic
good intentions, our greed? If not consumption,
exploitation, collaboration, at least
landfill, river dumping, Lotto . . .

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Haven't we failed to vote, purchased plastic,
ignored the petition?
Are we familiar with the term "society"?
But he hasn't yet looked up from his notes
on the nature of prosperity.
He can't, surely, be celebrating our good fortune?
Is this what he's come to after years of activism,
rage, boredom, grief? Central heating, he's saying
now. The bowl of milk put down for the cat.
Blankets on our children's beds. Books.
The dogwood and redbud in the Missouri spring.
Spring itself.
Winter. Summer. Fall.
Is he trying to break our hearts?
Has he no heart at all?

These Same, These Many Birds

that daily skim the railings of the deck
and wait their turn at the shallow bath
or wait dispersal at the grackles' crack
of black command and then come back,
won't break their pledge to keep me fixed
on degrees of home and distances.
The parabola their tree to house to feeder makes
—though sketched on air—remains crosshatched
by each day's partial looping back,
a record I log each evening at the sink
rinsing plates and cutlery in sinking
geometries of my own. These same, these many birds
drag the ragged hem of light to earth
then fold their hollow bones. Are there birds
there, where you are, in the dark? Heart,
this skein of thought flings out
to net and bring you near. Husband
your wife, the nightjars call, before
the fall the fall the fall.

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JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Family Values

"Apart from your brother," my father used to say, "money is your best friend." He said it to me early, and he said it more than once. A man who came to maturity during the Depression, my father thought a lot about money. He made a good amount of it, too, especially for someone who never finished high school. Money was the source of much of the psychological pleasure he took in life. "You know," he said to me repeatedly in his later years, "it's a source of satisfaction to me in my old age to know that I don't have to worry or depend on anybody else for anything."

Money could also be the cause of regret in my father. Driving around Chicago together, he would often point out some handsome old office building and tell me that, in 1934, he could have had it, as he always put it, for a song. "Sixty grand was all that it took, but in those days that was a lot of dough. Oh, well," he would trail off, a look of philosophical resignation flitting briefly across his face. When he died, he left an estate worth just under two million, not bad for a man whose business was printing menus, stationery, and clothing labels and who never had more than eight people working for him at any one time.

I may have been less impressed with money than my father, but I certainly never thought it a trivial matter. Even as a boy, I noticed many of the things money could do: among them, gain you respect and give you confidence. In my father's small circle of friends, the man with the most money could usually be depended upon to do the most talking, his authority extending to all subjects, from balanced budgets to birth control.

I could see where money might be your friend, if not quite your best friend, but the problem I had with my father's maxim was the introductory bit about my brother. I'm afraid that I never came near to thinking of my brother Lou as my best friend, though there were times when I would have liked to. We never fought,

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Lou and I, but neither did we get along all that well—not, I suspect, that Lou ever noticed.

Lou is four years older than I. Four years is a funny chronological distance for brothers. During school days, it meant Lou was always leaving places I was about to enter: high school, college, the Army. As soon as I had a common experience with my brother and therefore something to talk about in a close way, he was gone, on to something else, off to somewhere else. The other part of the problem was that, after Lou, I was viewed as something of a disappointment. It wasn't as easy for me to admit this when I was a kid as it is now, but I always knew it was true.

When we were kids I envied everything about my brother. He was dark and came into his physical maturity early; I got our mother's fair skin and light brown hair and didn't shave until I was past twenty. At only five foot ten, Lou was the star his junior and senior years of the Senn High School basketball team, second team all-city the year he graduated. A dead shot, my brother picked up the nickname True Lou, sometimes reduced to just "True." I wasn't there myself, but once, against Amundsen High, the kids from Amundsen, mostly working-class Germans and Swedes, took up the Senn High chant of "True Lou, True Lou," changing it to "Jew Lou, Jew Lou." My brother, in response, scored thirty-seven points and blew them off the court.

In our apartment on Talman, in the two-flat my father bought just after the war, my brother and I shared a bedroom. I recall waking early one summer morning—I was fourteen, Lou eighteen—and looking over into the next bed, and there was my brother, sleeping on his back, dark and muscular, in his boxer shorts, his handsome face in perfect repose.

"Tell me, Lou," I remember thinking, "where do I get courage? Tell me how to deal successfully with girls. How do I make kids admire me? You know all about these things, Lou. Please, let me in on them." At that moment, my brother groaned, and turned over on his side, his back now to me, and fell into even deeper sleep.

I was a pre-med at the University of Michigan, until I ran into something called organic chemistry, which put an end to my plan to become a physician. I finished with a degree in zoology, but with no real interest in going on to graduate school. So I returned to Chicago, got a teaching certificate, and began teaching high

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school in the public school system. My father always used to say that a man has to love what he does for a living, but I think he must have been disappointed by my choice of work. He never said anything about it to me, but teaching in the public schools was to him, I would guess, like working in the post office: it showed a serious want of ambition.

I sensed he thought his son Louis was closer to the right idea. A business major at the University of Illinois, after graduation Lou became a stockbroker. I once asked him why he didn't go into our father's business. "Are you kidding, Aaron?" he said. "Our old man uses up all the oxygen in the joint. There's not enough air for anyone else down there to breathe." Lou was right, of course.

Our father was too conservative to play the stock market, even when his son wanted to let him in on a pretty sure thing. ("The only sure thing in this life, Louis, is death," he used to say. "Everything else is in doubt.") Our father loved control. "Something doesn't sell, I can change the price, I can create movement. But with stock, I'm helpless; I'm in the hands of the big boys, who don't give a good god damn for my lousy few bucks." Yet, despite all this talk, I still think our father was pleased to have a son so clearly in on the action.

I know our mother was more than pleased about Lou's marriage. Dotty Kagan was a catch. Her father was the biggest Buick dealer in the city. A large bluff man with silver hair, Solly Kagan was connected—in every way. Five-hundred-odd guests were at the wedding at the Drake Hotel: sports, show business, Mafia people, everyone was there, more than twice as many Kagan as Rabinowitz guests. I was a groomsman. A guy named Howie Bloch, who played basketball for DePaul, was Lou's best man. My father came up to me, in a rented tuxedo, a glass of champagne in his hand—a far from usual sight—and, slipping his arm around my shoulder, leaned in and whispered, "Did you ever see so many four-flushers in one room?"

I suppose Lou could have gone into business with Solly Kagan, but selling Buicks wasn't what he had in mind. Not long after his marriage he left his stockbrokerage firm and, with his father-in-law's help, bought a seat on the Commodities Exchange. Wild stories floated around in those days about the lottery-like fortunes being made in pork bellies, soybeans, corn, and the rest of it. Urban young men who had never seen a farm outside the movies

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were said to make hundreds of grand in the course of a few days bidding this or that grain or vegetable or slaughtered animal up or down. At the end of a good week on the Commodities market, guys would stop on the way home to order a Rolls-Royce, or get on a jet bound for Vegas or Acapulco with a girlfriend and return Sunday night, so as not to miss Monday's action.

The Commodities market closed at 2:00, when Lou and his pals departed for the McClurg Court Health Club. They played basketball and racquetball and, after a day of gambling on the market, turned their attention to betting on ball games. Sitting in front of one of the club television sets on a Tuesday afternoon watching a Cubs-Phillies game, Kenny Holtzman going against Steven Carlton, a friend of my brother's named Lloydie Franks, taking the Cubs, bet his current-year Jaguar against a guy named Norm Friedman's current-year Mercedes. At the end of the game, which the Cubs lost in extra innings, Lloydie flipped his car keys over to Friedman, and took a cab home. "I never liked that goddamn maroon on that Jaguar," he said. The next morning he ordered a new one, in dark blue.

Wild success stories on the Commodities market were pretty standard. This guy had a half-million-dollar week, or another guy had a two-hundred-grand morning. Stories of guys tapping out were talked about a great deal less. My brother Lou's was such a story. After holding his own for two years or so, Lou went belly up. Carloads of wheat did him in. Completely busted out, he lost his seat and his wife's savings.

Lou must have heard a good deal about it from Dotty. To shore himself up, maybe to rebuild his confidence, Lou started in on some pretty serious skirt chasing. He may have been cheating on his wife long before, it wasn't the kind of thing he would have told me, but suddenly I would hear stories about my brother on Rush Street with one or another knock-out woman. "I saw your big brother at the Orange Tree last night," my friend Mel Rosen told me, "with a blonde who was off the charts." Dotty was a brunette.

I didn't see much of Lou and his wife, except when they came to my parents' apartment for Passover and high holiday dinners. They had a two-bedroom apartment on Sheridan Road, in The Berry, near Belmont. Dotty worked part-time for her father. She had had a miscarriage three months into a pregnancy. It was hard not to sense that she held herself above our family. At my

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mother's dinner table, she acted as if she were visiting royalty. I once met her with two of her girl friends, coming out of Saks on Michigan Avenue, and she introduced me as her brother-in-law, Lou's younger brother "Arthur." I decided not to correct her. I mean, what would have been the point?

"Let's count our blessings," my father said, when the divorce was announced. "At least there weren't any kids."

Not long after his divorce, Lou moved to Florida. Buddy Lansfield, a friend of my brother's from high school, was selling real estate down there, a big condo development at Delray Beach, and told Lou to get the hell on a plane, there was a fortune to be made. After that, I would hear about my brother from time to time from my father.

"Heard from your brother Louis last week," he would say. "Apparently he's doing a nice job in Florida. It's not the gold mine he thought it would be, but he's making a good buck, or so he says."

I had been teaching biology and general science at Mather High for nearly eight years when Lou remarried. (I never married. Until forty-five, I considered myself single; now, at fifty-two, I think of myself as a permanent bachelor.) Lou's second wife, Ginny, was a large redhead, Gentile, a runner-up in a Miss Florida beauty pageant.

"Oh," she said, the first time Lou had brought her to Chicago to meet our parents. "Lou's little brother. How sweet!" And she enfolded me in this warm, fleshy, perfumed embrace. "Lou's told me so much about you, Aaron." What, I wondered, could it have been? What did Lou actually know about me to tell?

"Welcome to the Rabinowitz family, Ginny," I said, rather lamely, still mildly disoriented from my new sister-in-law's hug.

I neglected to mention that Lou had legally changed his name from Rabinowitz to Rabin. When I asked him why, he just said that Rabin was a hell of a lot simpler all around. Our father was a little put off by this. "It isn't elegant, the name Rabinowitz," he said to me not long after Lou had told him about shortening his name, "but at least it is what it is, if you know what I mean."

I would have guessed that Lou's second marriage wouldn't have lasted long, but I would have been wrong. He and Ginny stayed together. They had two kids, a daughter Ashley and a son Scott. ("Your brother gives his kids names that sound like streets," my

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father said.) Unlike Dotty, Ginny thought she was marrying up, and she always made a great fuss when my parents flew down to Delray to visit their grandchildren. Although they weren't at first too crazy about their son marrying a non-Jew, they came to appreciate that their second daughter-in-law had a good heart, which meant a lot to them. It was Ginny who insisted that their son Scott be sent to Hebrew school and go through a bar mitzvah.

Whether Lou played around on Ginny, I haven't any idea. I went down to Delray five or six times, especially when my parents hit their late seventies and didn't travel so easily on their own. But even there I didn't see all that much of my brother. He had become a golfer, a good one, with a two-stroke handicap, and much of the time he seemed to be on the course at his club. In Florida, Lou ran with the same kind of crowd he had run with in Chicago: former athletes, high rollers, guys with a taste for all kinds of action. He played in golf games where at the end of a round two or three thousand bucks might change hands. Ginny cut Lou a wide and very tolerant swath. If my brother didn't come for dinner, even when his parents were visiting, well, that was all right; he was probably at the club, playing thirty-six. "You know Lou," Ginny said, with a smile, to my mother.

Back in Chicago, I happened to be with my father when Sam Kaufman, his neighbor on Talman, after greeting me, asked my father how his son in Florida was doing.

"What can I tell you," my father said. "Fifty-five years old and he's still chasing balls. Once basketballs, now golf balls. Near as I can tell, he's playing games all day and farting in silk."

After my mother died—of congestive heart failure; she had, for reasons she chose never to tell, refused a pacemaker—I began to see more of my father. He was seventy-eight and without the woman who had been with him for fifty-eight years. A senior citizens' home of any kind was out of the question for my father; he planned to stay in the apartment on Talman. His mind was good, his health, except for high blood pressure and a touch of rheumatism in the right hip, not bad. He now joined me in the bachelor ranks. We began to have dinners together twice a week, on Wednesdays and on Sundays.

Wednesdays we went to The Bagel, on Devon, where the crowd was very geriatric and where my father invariably ordered a salami omelette; Sundays we went to Pekin House, on Western, where he

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liked the chicken chow mein and the egg foo yung and where the Chinese owner, after so many years of catering to his Jewish clientele, had himself begun to look Jewish. Conversation wasn't always easy. Having closed up his business three years before, my father had lost his major source of stories. He also had a taste for capping sentences, for closing off a big subject. When Communism fell, for example, all he said was: "What did you expect? It was doomed by impracticality from the start." So much for worldwide Communism. Once—only once—did he say, as if it were an astonishing revelation, "You know, I miss your mother." I assured him that there was hardly anything unnatural about that.

Always laconic, after wandering alone perhaps talking to himself in his apartment all day, he became less expansive than ever. Occasionally, he would regain his old bleak incisiveness. One night at The Bagel, searching for topics of conversation, I complained about the relentlessness of the commercials on television. Mildly stimulated by this, my father set out the three main ways of doing business in America. At the upper levels, he said, you supplied customers with national advertising and public relations; at the middle level, you bought them liquor or theater tickets or women; and then there was his level. "What's that, Dad?" I asked. "Oh," he said, "I cut prices. I always thought it was much more honorable."

Our positions in life had subtly altered. Suddenly, I was now closer to the parent, he to the child. "Dad, there's a bit of rice on your chin," I would catch myself saying. "Dad, you have enough milk and everything in the apartment?" I would ask. Yet, despite this, I continued to regard him as having superior wisdom. Every time I drove over to Talman to pick him up, I felt a slight thrill of anticipation. Perhaps tonight he would tell me what he had been thinking as he came to the end of his days. Perhaps tonight he would fill me in on the meaning of his life, with clues about the meaning of my own. Perhaps tonight he would tell me what he really thought—about me, about my brother, about what he counted as significant in life.

He never did. My father died eighteen months after his wife—in his sleep, of a stroke. I didn't, finally, even know what my father thought of me. Whatever it might have been, I couldn't help wonder if it wouldn't have been different had I made it to

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med school and become a physician. Would he have shown a pride in me, which he never came close to showing in my being a high-school science teacher? When I was with him, even in those last eighteen months, I always felt a little, I don't know, a little insignificant, as if I were his driver or male secretary or employee. He never even asked me why I hadn't married. When your son becomes a man, I read somewhere, make him your brother. I know my father never regarded me as anything other than his youngest son, a kid, even though I was past fifty and telling him to remove the rice from his chin or that dab of egg from the corner of his lip.

What if I had been the older brother? I used to wonder. What if there had been no Lou at all? What if I had been allowed to go about things in my own way, without always being compared to my brother or feeling that I had to go at things in another way? Where is it decreed that only one brother sleeps with beautiful women, feels no responsibility other than for himself, gets to wear the peach-colored golf pants?

One of the things my father and I did sometimes discuss at those Bagel and Pekin House dinners was his finances. He never bragged about how well he had done in business, but it was clear that he was pleased by the fact that, living by his few tight moral maxims—keep your overhead low, don't live beyond your means, always put away something for a rainy day—he had come out a winner.

Always a careful businessman, my father wanted me to know the details of his finances, so that in the event of his death there would be no surprises or loose ends. Whenever he traveled, he reminded me where he hid the key to his box in the bank vault. He showed me where he put the small brown notebook in which he kept a record of his various mutual funds, certificates of deposit, Israel bonds, and savings accounts along with the dates on which his interest checks arrived. One night before going out to Pekin House, we sat at the dining room table and he went through each page of this notebook with me. When he came to the last page on which he had any notations, he shuffled to a page toward the rear in which, in light pencil, he had the notation: "Louis—$100,000."

"One thing more," my father said, "about six years ago I lent

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your brother a hundred grand. He was in some sort of difficulty. I never asked what it was. He hasn't paid it back."

"You never asked for it?"

"That's right. I'm sure when he has it, he'll repay me."

"I see," I said, though I didn't, not really.

"Anyhow," my father said, "I thought you ought to know about it, just in case."

"In case of what?"

"In case I check out a little early," he said, with the practiced coolness with which he always mentioned death.

This conversation took place a little more than a month before he died.

Our father died on a Monday night, and Lou and his wife arrived from Florida Tuesday night. The burial was scheduled for Thursday morning. ("Jews don't screw around," my father used to say, "they get the corpse in the ground quick. Right thing to do, too.") I thought they would stay at my father's place, but instead Lou and his wife checked into the Ritz-Carlton on Michigan Avenue.

Lou was supposed to meet me at Weinstein Brothers to make funeral arrangements on Wednesday morning, but was late. I dealt with one of the Weinstein grandsons, a short fellow with an expensive haircut wearing a double-breasted suit whose lining, when he unbuttoned his coat at his desk, matched his yarmulke. Quite a touch, I thought. He was showing me around the casket room when Lou walked in.

"Sorry to be late, Aaron," he said. "I had a tough time getting a cab."

"Morning, Lou," I said. "This is Mr. Arnold Weinstein."

After they shook hands, Weinstein said he would leave the two of us alone to make our choice of caskets.

My brother, I have to say, looked terrific. He had his year-round tan. His hair was still black and thick. (Mine was thin and grey, what there was left of it.) He wasn't wearing glasses; I never saw him in glasses. He didn't wear a necktie, either, but an open-collar, deep blue silk shirt. He had on a light grey suit and black loafters with gold chains across the front. He wore a thin, black-faced watch with a heavy gold and silver band. He was still True Lou, and he looked as if life had never laid a glove on him.

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"Dad told me that we weren't to undergo any big expense," I said. "His instructions were to keep it simple."

"What's simple mean?"

"Near as I can tell, it means about eleven hundred bucks," I said, and pointed out a plain oak coffin that had a Jewish star carved on its cover. "That's the same casket we had for mother."

"Our father drove Oldsmobiles all his life," Lou said, "and it looks as if he's going out in a Chevy, and not top of the line, either." He put an arm around my shoulder—I don't remember his ever doing that before—and we walked together to Arnold Weinstein's office, where the figures were added up and the final documents signed.

When I drove Lou over to the Talman Avenue apartment, he explained that Ginny was doing some shopping downtown. His son Scott was flying in from the University of Florida in Gainesville later this evening. Ashley had just started a new job—something to do with making travel arrangements for large corporations—and felt it was a mistake to take time off, even for a few days. He knew I would understand. When I drove up in front of the old two-flat, I greeted Harry Becker, who lived two buildings down and who paid his condolences.

"You remember my brother, Lou," I said.

"Of course," he said, "the basketball player. How're you doin'?"

When we were inside, Lou asked me who Becker was, and was a little surprised when I told him that he had been in the same house since we were boys. I had made a start at going through our parents' things, and had left two boxes of old photos out on the dining room table. I suggested that he might like to go through them and take what he wanted. Lou didn't seem much interested.

"All this old furniture has really had it," he said, looking around. "I suppose we can have something like an estate sale and get rid of it in one shot."

"Anything here you think Ginny might like? Ma's good dishes, maybe? Or her silver?"

"I'll check with her," Lou said, dropping onto the white couch in the living room. "Sit a minute, kid. I know the load of all the detail has fallen on you. What can I do to help?"

"Not much, really. Dad left things in very good order. He was a tidy man."

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"Good order was one of the things he valued," my brother said.

"He left us a lot of money," I said. "And he set up trusts for your children. All this goes through Kornfeld, his lawyer. He's an old-timer but at least he's not going to charge us $250 an hour."

"Our old man wouldn't pay $250 for an hour in the sack with Rita Hayworth and Marilyn Monroe—together."

"Sounds accurate to me," I said. "He once told me that if other men were ready to lie, cheat, and kill for money, the least he could do was respect it. Anyhow he always did."

"And now it's ours to piss away any way we like," Lou said. "Must be a moral in there somewhere."

Lou said he was hungry, and so I drove him over to The Bagel, whose customers seemed, on this day, particularly decrepit. Every table had someone with a walker or a bad case of osteoporosis or a vacant look in the eyes. The rest were vastly overweight.

"Jesus, this joint makes Florida look more youthful than the winter Olympic tryouts," Lou said.

When our food came, Lou asked me what I knew about the financial details in the will. I explained that, apart from the benefactions to his kids and a few donations to Jewish charities, everything was to be split evenly between us. I told him that the estate came to just under two million, and the sale of the two-flat on Talman would put it well over that. He showed no emotion. I made no mention of the hundred grand he borrowed from our father.

"What'll this money mean to you?" he asked.

"Don't get me wrong," I said, "I'm damn glad to have it, but it's come a little late for me. Maybe I'll use it to travel. Buy a fancier car. I've always wanted a convertible."

"What're you waiting for? Do it."

"Maybe I will."

"I have business plans for this money," my brother said. "There's new development possibilities on the West Coast of Florida. This money will make it possible for me to be a player—not a major player, but at least I'll be able to take a hand. I've made a decent living over the years, but I'd still like a chance to break the bank."

"What do you suppose our father had it in mind for us to do with this money?"

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"Probably sit on it," Lou said.

"Did you love him, Lou?"

"I'm not sure love enters in. I've been away from Chicago for more than thirty years. He never did me any harm. A couple of times he was there for me when I was in a tight spot. He sure as hell wasn't the kind of guy you'd turn to if you had any kind of emotional problem. He provided. He did the best he could, by his own lights."

"He was a lonely man."

"Lonely, I don't know. He was certainly a loner. Except for our mother, he was never close to anyone I know about."

"I admired him. He did his duty."

"I suppose you're right," said Lou, picking up the check and dropping two singles for a tip. "I better get back downtown."

"I'll drive you."

I took Peterson down to the Drive. We passed Senn High School, that monumental grey structure, the scene of True Lou Rabinowitz's greatest glory. Woebegone-looking Mexican and black kids were standing on Ridge, waiting for a bus. Lots of graffiti in black paint were splattered on the walls of the school building.

"Christ," said Lou, "it all looks so dilapidated."

"That's only because it is."

Lake Shore Drive, with its grand buildings, revived his spirits.

"You know, Aaron, I once asked our old man why he never moved to the Drive. I think mother would have liked the luxury of it. Do you know what he told me? He told me, 'What do I need it for? So that every time I want to use my car I have to tip a guy a buck to fetch it for me?' Case closed."

"Maybe it's such thinking that allows you to save up a couple of million bucks."

"Maybe so."

Lou and Ginny had a date for dinner with some old friends of Lou's that night. We'd meet at 9:30 the next morning at the funeral home.

"Oh, one more thing," Lou said in front of the hotel, holding the car door half open. "A few years ago Dad loaned me ten grand, which I never got around to paying him back. Don't forget to mention that to the lawyer when it comes to closing accounts."

My brother leaned closer, shook my hand. I can't be sure what

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expression, if any, was on my face. "Take care, kid," he said, patting me on the knee, and walked around the car and into the Ritz-Carlton.

"Ten grand," I yelled into the windshield, driving away from the hotel. "Off by only ninety grand, Bro." Back on the Outer Drive, the lake gleaming sapphire blue on my right, I thought, all these years my brother Lou ignores me, and now he plans to screw me. What a prick!

The funeral went off smoothly enough. In his eulogy, the rabbi concentrated on our father's contributions to Jewish charities and on his love for his family. It was a bright October day. Two high-school buddies of Lou's, both now bald and paunchy, and four men who taught with me in the science department at Mather served as pallbearers.

Back at the apartment a few old friends of my mother's, Sam Kaufman, Harry Becker, and three or four other old neighbors showed up along with the pallbearers. Ginny ordered much too elaborate a lazy Susan tray, which, with all its uneaten chopped liver, corned beef, salami, cole slaw, pickles, olives, and potato salad now sat there forlornly: the funeral meats growing cold. When everyone had left, Lou, Ginny, and I sat in my parents' living room. We were all dressed in black, cups of coffee in front of us.

"If ever there was a time for a cigarette, this is it," Lou said.

"How long ago did you quit?" I asked.

"Your brother stopped smoking a little more than two years ago," Ginny said.

"And a day hasn't gone by when I haven't thought about it. Did you ever smoke, Aaron?"

"For twenty years, two packs a day toward the end," I answered, once again freshly amazed at what my brother didn't know, or never bothered to notice, about me.

"Your brother and I are very grateful to you, Aaron, for watching out for Dad and now for seeing after the funeral and the lawyer and the real estate and everything," Ginny said.

"No big problem," I said. I wondered if Ginny knew about the hundred grand that her husband had borrowed, and decided that guys like Lou didn't tell such things to their wives.

"Still, we owe you," Lou said.

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About ninety thousand dollars more than you're ready to acknowledge, brother, I thought of shooting back, and this was the perfect time, the golden opportunity to land the shot that kills.

"Don't think twice about it," I said.

Well, I thought, a great chance blown? I could've nailed Lou right there, in front of his wife. God knows, he deserves it.

"Lou," I said, "there's something we have to talk about. Do you mind taking a walk around the block with me?"

"Sure, Aaron," Lou said, shooting back his cuff, so that he could look down at his black-faced watch. I noted the thickness of his wrist, the hairiness of the backs of his hands. He had a fresh manicure.

We were out on Talman Avenue, my brother and I, in the crisp autumn air. I remembered this block, our block, more than forty years ago when people were still allowed to burn leaves in the gutter. I remembered the fine smell of burning leaves and the glow of small fires in the twilight. In winter, I would come home from Hebrew school in the dark down this block, carrying my book cradled in my left arm like a football, using my other arm to stiff-arm would-be tacklers, whom I dodged in the style of George MacAffee or J. R. Boone or some of the other great Bear running backs of the time.

"What's on your mind, kid?" Lou said.

"A hundred grand, Lou," I replied.

"Whaddya mean? What hundred grand?"

"The hundred grand you borrowed from Dad."

"What do you know about that?"

"Dad told me he lent you a hundred thousand dollars. He made a notation in his records about it."

"Did he? Did he note that I returned the money roughly a year ago?"

"No. He didn't say anything about your having returned it. And he first mentioned it a month ago."

"Well, I did. And then, later, I borrowed another ten grand from him, which I mentioned to you yesterday in front of the Ritz-Carlton."

My brother looked straight ahead. He picked up his pace. I would have bet the entire hundred grand that he was lying.

"You have any proof you paid it back?" I asked.

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"You have any proof I didn't?" he replied.

"Dad would have told me."

"How can you be so sure? The old man's memory wasn't so great."

"A hundred grand payment he wouldn't forget."

"Well, I'm telling you I repaid him. The burden's on you to prove otherwise. Maybe you want to go to court about it?"

"Dad would've loved that."

"The decision's yours, Aaron," he said, without looking over at me.

"There really isn't any goddamn decision, and you know it, Lou."

My brother stopped. Turning to me, he said, "I'm telling you, I gave the old man back that hundred grand. Believe it or not. Either way, I don't give a fuck."

"You're a liar," I said, feeling myself slip out of control, "and a jagoff." The last, strangely, was a word I hadn't used since high school.

Lou grabbed me by the upper part of my necktie. He brought back his fist. I felt myself wince. My own fist was in the air. I saw us, two men in their fifties, rolling around on the ground on the corner of Talman and North Shore. Were we supposed to be Cain and Abel, or Esau and Jacob? Two of the Three Stooges seemed more like it. Lou, too, must have been struck by the ridiculousness of it, for he lowered his fist and let go of my tie.

"You're a fool," he said, "you know that, a damn fool."

I didn't answer. We walked back to the apartment without speaking. As I turned to the door, Lou, again looking down at his watch, said, "Tell Ginny I'll meet her out here."

Ginny was washing dishes, wearing one of my mother's old aprons. I told her Lou was waiting outside and eager to get going.

"Let me at least help you put away all this deli," she said.

"No need," I said, "I'll get it after you take off."

Lou was sitting in the silver-colored Lincoln Town Car he had rented for the day. I walked Ginny around to the passenger side and held the door open for her. Before she got in, she hugged me and kissed me on the cheek.

I walked round to the other side. My brother was seated behind the wheel, the window on his side up. He had on sunglasses. He

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looked straight ahead. He drove away without a word. It struck me that, with my father dead, I might never see my brother again.

I stood for a moment on the curb watching them drive off down the street on which Lou and I had grown up. As the car turned east at the corner, for some reason I muttered, "Sail on, silver bird," a line from some crappy song that had stuck in my mind.

I returned to the apartment. In the kitchen I found some aluminum foil, and began to wrap the corned beef, salami, and the rest to take back to my apartment. I never eat olives, but I wrapped those, too. I gazed through the dining room to the front of the apartment, which contained so many of the things my mother once loved. I had to sit down, before the lazy Susan, in one of the dining room chairs and take several deep breaths, exhaling through the mouth. It was all over, done.

You're only free when both your parents are dead, or so I've heard it said. I suppose what is meant here is that, with your parents dead, there is no one left who can still regard you as a child. Or, maybe, as in my case, with no kids of my own, it means that family responsibilities are over at last. I don't really know. All I know is that I was now without any family whatsoever, and it wasn't freedom I was feeling but an emptiness that went deep down and that I knew I would never completely be able to shake.

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ANDREW HUDGINS

Purple

As a boy
I'd lie in bed and
try to rise
up past
the ceiling light,
out through
white gypsum board,
through fiberglass,
through
plywood sheathing and finally
through asphalt shingles and into warm
night breezes that would
waft me,
lighter than air,
where their caprice
inclines for the wind
bloweth
where it listeth. I don't.
I've more than failed. I've never budged.
My flights
are merely metaphor:
the purple
throat of a shasta lily
which does not sing and cannot swallow;
the blue
illusion at the heart
of ice, which does not
pulse with blood:
so free of meaning
—lily, ice—
I cannot let them be just blue
or purple.
I make

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them royalty
and sorrow. Even
the ripe fruit
of my
front-yard mulberry: I cannot
cannot let it be.
Each berry's
bursting with a bead
of, of . . .
of life, light, newness, meaning
and yet more meaning,
like alchemy
which groans
to make base into gold
or gold to platinum, or platinum
to something better—
by magic
to make the bad world good, the cruel
world kind.

Beneath the mulberry
and beneath
the overripe and rotted
fruit that's fallen from it,
I plant
new bulbs,
and when I'm done
I'm purple—
a purple
that means nothing, nothing,
my feet, knees, hands, forearms, elbows
stained
purple with crushed fruit
so I can all winter long enjoy
next spring,
where in the purple
shadows
of the mulberry
bees clamber the first
grape hyacinth, and the second

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grape hyacinth
prepares
its tiny bells for them,
and the third sends up its flower stalk,
and the fourth,
having rotted over winter,
is now half
black earth
and the fifth also
—a laughable gap in my design—
and the sixth shoulders aside
black earth
and the purple shadow,
and the seventh,
still underground, feels
the sun's warmth,
and deep
in the stunned bulb, quick
cells
divide and redivide,
accelerating.

Bloodspike

I leaned
across the sink and studied
in the bathroom mirror a huge
red blemish
high
on my forehead, and when
I pressed,
slowly a four-inch spike of frozen
black blood slid from my face.
It dropped,
I caught
it, it
melted on my palm,

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dripped in the sink,
growing hotter and hotter
until it boiled,
and I remembered then
what the severed catfish head
had told me:
"Writing's easy, thinking's hard.
Write what you think. I had
to die
to learn this." For years
I had believed it.
For years
I'd tried to live that half life
till reason trumped
reason and the obvious
stabbed me: What else
would a severed head say?
And why accept the dead's half knowledge
because it's impossible,
thus
beautiful in its sorrow?
But in the nearer
dream, I stared
at the
thick puddle of melted blood,
and thought
—this is the stupid truth—
Now I know everything.
What else
would you expect a man to say
after he's
expressed a four-
inch
bloodspike from his head
and watched
the black blood melt, pool
in bone-
white porcelain
—his own lost blood—
and rise to a hard frothing boil.

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Ballade

For shame! the public taunted Wilde.
You beast! you fiend! you sodomite!
Those whom his epigrams had riled
Could be revenged with open spite:
No need for wit when one is right.
How long, indeed, may one ignore
Fairies abroad in the noonday light?
Bid them farewell and close the door.
Let them inhabit their native night,
And should they ask a moment more,
No need with such to be polite:
Bid them farewell and close the door.

It's their turn now to be reviled:
O Philistine! O troglodyte!
O virgin ears and eyes defiled
By homosexual delight
In tongues that lick and teeth that bite!
It took a hundred years before
The balance shifted so we might
Bid them farewell and close the door
Upon the sorrow and the blight
Of history. We do keep score,
Of course, but let us, this one night,
Bid them farewell and close the door.

Now let those who've been beguiled
By judge's wig and bishop's rite
Learn how many, just like Wilde,
Have earned the name of sodomite.
From their closets extradite
The admiral and commodore,

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Politico and cenobite.
Bid them farewell and close the door
So they must share the outcasts' plight,
Uncloseted forevermore,
Out in the open, trapped by the light.
Bid them farewell and close the door.

Four Rondeaux

On the Rondeau

How to paint a tondo: you must represent the Virgin—
The Madonna and the Child she's nursing.
  You must not show a bowl of peaches,
  Sisley's streets, or Boudin's beaches.
It must be Mary and the Infant Jesus.

We all have itches, inclinations, urges,
But they are not to be encouraged.
  Study the Masters. Raphael teaches
    Us to paint a tondo

As a tondo should be painted: a Virgin
And a Child. Not a nude emerging
  From a seashell or a pair of dirty breeches.
Madonna and Bambino. Single Mom and Urchin.
    That is how to paint a tondo.

Rondeau for Emporio Armani

What is Armani? What if not money
Made visible? So, too, Dior, Gianni
  Versace—even, in a sense,
  Reeboks and Nikes. The pretense
That these scruffy slacks or a gunny-

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Sack from Saks or Playboy bunny
Lingerie are sartorially stunning
  Is bunk. They're nothing but Expense.
    What is Armani

Doing, though, that everyone in Cunning
101 doesn't do as well? Money
  Smells so good. We've no defense
Against our appetites. It isn't funny.
    What is? Armani.

Children's Letters to God

Dear God Almighty, Was Jesus Jew-
ish? My pop says no, it isn't true.
  Two weeks from now I will be seven!
  Yours Sincerely, Barry Levin.
P.S. Did I mention—I am, too?

God—If you will cure me of this flu
I will pay for every *Screw*
  I lifted from the Seven-Eleven. [unsigned]
    Dear God Almighty,

Hi there! We've moved to Euclid Avenue.
My all-time favorite color's blue,
  The same as yours must be in heaven.
  That's all for now. Sincerely, Kevin.
(I hope that everything's all right with *you*,
      Dear God Almighty.)

A Commentary on Psalm 84

Does God keep score? Is He aware
Of what I've achieved at solitaire?
  Does He concern Himself with all
  The errors in *Das Kapital*?
And for sparrows—is He there?

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If I were God, I wouldn't care
Which sparrow fell, or when, or where.
  Shit happens. It may appall,
    But who keeps score?

As well ask, is Existence fair?
Or, will I get my proper share?
  Sparrows fly, and sparrows fall,
And God is neither here nor there.
    No one keeps score.

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ROBERT RICHMAN

The Waters of March

All those words—read, rated, cast into verse—
and none to turn to.
And now, baffling memory,
lines read upon hearing
the news: *In the hands of poets*
the dead are airy toys.

We said we would come
when the rain stopped, when the roads dried,
when spring arrived.
But storm followed storm; the rain continued.
Later that week
I dreamed I drove to the house,
opened the door,
climbed the stairs, and heard the kitchen tap running.
It ran
like the waters of March, like the rain
that pummeled the roofs,
flooded the land, emptied into the sea,
and rose again
in a cold vapor, to no purpose. I think of you,
caught forever
in winter, your eyes not allowed
to see the sun,
as planets and stars continue their routine,
oblivious as words.

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JEROME MAZZARO

Road Thoughts

With my bad eyes, I seldom drive all night,
preferring rather to set out at dawn
and, traveling East, observe the reddish hue
suffusing the dark crests of stands beyond.
The quiet of the road lets me pretend
I'm an explorer testing new limits,
though a center line below belies that fact.
Self-lie, I know, precedes all other lies.
Still, thoughts of someone waiting at the end
or someone counting on my safe return
can fuel direction at this early hour,
repairing absence in the self I bear.
Once I believed that I was like others,
stitching by simile my life to theirs,
and let the total pattern stand for all,
as in a crowd scene some past master struck.
Dim houses tell me now I'm near a town,
their breeding windows warn of needed care.
Lit all night, a broken neon hisses,
suggesting townspeople yet drowsed in sleep.
A yapping yard dog flushes out small game,
and as if respectful, buildings give way,
as broad fields return, boasting buttercups,
barns, and wood fences, and above the trees
strands of a gray and rose and green and blue
spread to engulf me, closing off the past.

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GEORGE WATSON

Prophet Against God: William Empson (1906-84)

A little less than middle height, he spoke in an accent that sounded clipped and archaic, and his movements were as darting and unpredictable as his mind. It was natural to be startled by the presence of William Empson, however glad you might be to know that he was there. Of all the beings I have ever known he was the most utterly alive, and you felt at once quickened and nervous in his company. When we first met, in a college room in Oxford in 1952, he struck me as someone peculiar to himself and wholly out of sequence, whether of time or place; and it was only with the passing years that his views and behavior began to cohere in themselves or to relate to anything much in the world at large. In 1952 I had never met anyone like him, and never did again.

He had left England in 1930, after Cambridge and London, to teach English in the Far East, following his Cambridge teacher I. A. Richards. Brought up among the Yorkshire fox-hunting gentry after the First World War, he maintained to the end a style that never quite lost contact with that remote and forgotten world. "The literary tastes of the twenties," he once remarked, "are still encapsulated within me," and his turn of phrase often reminded you of some twenties novelist like Aldous Huxley or P. G. Wodehouse. Words like "ripping" and "plucky" came naturally to him. His manners could be impeccable, even elaborate, especially with ladies, when a gentlemanly upbringing and his Winchester school days came to the fore; but he could also be irascible, especially when bored. He believed that he had a duty to entertain, and that others did too.

His appearance broke the rules of any age there has ever been, especially in his middle years, when an abundant beard flowed out prophet-like from around and beneath his chin, which was shaved in front; in his last years it was removed, leaving only a

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white moustache. His movements too were disconcerting. Walking with me and his wife once in a Cambridge college garden, he suddenly shot ahead and disappeared down a side path, reappearing in front of us as if from nowhere—something he had done in a West African jungle, she told me uncomplainingly, leaving her with two small children for two hours in tropical heat. A bohemian gentleman, he governed his marriage by the rules, or rather the anarchy, of a world poised between the aristocratic values of an old ruling class and the literary bars and restaurants of a great city, living out his last years in London even when his teaching post was in his native Yorkshire. Divorce would have seemed middle class to him, in his lofty way; but his marriage remained till his death in 1984 a model of domestic affection, and it was at his kitchen table in Hampstead, in north London, that he seemed most at his ease. He drank seriously, at times too seriously, and adored quick-fire conversation, witty contention and Chinese food. Such, at least, was the being I thought I knew. But to the end of his days I was never sure if I knew him at all.

That, no doubt, was because in thirty years and more of acquaintance I was always at least slightly afraid of William Empson. He did not suffer fools or dullards gladly, if at all. His intelligence to the end was iconoclastic, his hatred of convention implacable. He was also a genius; perhaps the only genius in academic English in this century, which is to say at any time, since the subject is new. An uncomfortable genius, he made admirers rather than disciples. There is no school of Empson and never was, as there was once a school of I. A. Richards and a school of F. R. Leavis, of Lionel Trilling and of Northrop Frye, though a cult of multiple poetic meanings began with his first book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), and lingered on in schools and colleges for years. But then he hardly stayed long enough in any one place to found a school, or said the same sort of thing often enough to start a system; and as with other English critics of his generation—C. S. Lewis, for example—his theories never somehow entitled him to the title of a theorist. Talk about ambiguity, he would say in his later years, made him feel like Satan confronted with Sin and Death.

On the other hand Empson was perhaps the only literary critic of the century to have invented what might, in an embarrassed sort of way, be called a philosophy of history. It arose out of his fierce and undying hatred of monotheism, whether Judaic,

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Christian or Islamic; it figures most amply in his greatest and most radical polemic, *Milton's God* (1961);[1] and it informs, though not self-evidently, most of what he wrote in prose or in verse, early or late. In summary it goes like this. Since about 480 B.C., when Buddha, Confucius, Pythagoras and the second Isaiah died, mankind has been dragged down against their better advice into intolerance, persecution and religious wars by harsh dogmas of a single universal ruler, of divine rewards and punishments in an afterlife. Religion, as the Middle Ages and the modern age have known it, has made mankind worse; and what Ireland, the Balkans and the Middle East illustrate in our times is the abiding peril of imagining that there is only one God and that you know what He wants and means. Bohemian morals are not only more agreeable, then, than those of a church congregation, but more elevating too. It is your duty to have fun. The licentious seventeenth-century poet Lord Rochester, he once remarked in a 1953 review of a new edition of his poems, "praises pleasure as a philosopher, whose serious opinion is that it makes people kind to each other," adding that there is "enough truth in this, especially after wars of religion, to have a startling moral weight."

Empson's moral weight lies there. The odd thing is that some of his readers notice it hardly at all, and there are even those who imagine it is not seriously meant. Empson is still seen as above all a prophet of ambiguity and as a wayward, untidy master of verbal analysis. His views of divine providence, which mattered to him vastly more than practical criticism, never entered much in his lifetime into theological or even moral debate, and he was not much preached against, if at all, though he deserved to be and probably wanted to be. Perhaps he was preached against so little because he was felt to want it. Or perhaps the modern clergy does not take its own doctrines seriously enough to want to defend them in any literal way. We are living in an age in which you have to be a skeptic to take scripture at its face value; and the devout, it is often to be noticed, care more about the euphony of new versions of the Bible than about their accuracy. Empson was a skeptic who took scripture seriously and attacked it head-on, and that is why he deserves to be immortal.

[1] See also "The Satan of Milton," *The Hudson Review*, Volume XIII, No. 1 (Spring 1960), pp. 33-59.

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The room in Oxford where we first met in 1952, though small, was rather cold, and the group that had come to hear him was not large. Many in Empson's audience were uncertain whether they were meant to laugh or not: a doubt, or anxiety, he was much given to creating, and one he may have enjoyed. His lecturing style might charitably be called grotesque. It was rather as if Buster Keaton had decided, after many years as a silent comic, to open his mouth and deliver a solemn parody of an academic lecture. His voice, rapid and soft, would descend momentarily into a slurred mumble when the intensity of his convictions appeared to embarrass him; at such moments, on a platform, he would close his eyes in an intense, beatific expression that was not quite a smile and not quite a grimace. Behind the whimsy, one often felt, lay a certainty almost too deep to bear, and to hear him read aloud from one of his own poems was to realize that he was less a Neo-Metaphysical poet in the school of Donne than a Neo-Romantic in the school of Swinburne.

Even in private Empson was not always audible or coherent, though he had a devastating wit. On a platform his notes, such as they were, were not always under his physical control. A sheet of paper in his hands could suddenly acquire a life of its own. Lost for a name, he would lift one sheet above his head, then another, and rotate them with a desperate upward glance, until by some magic they would appear to grow larger and threaten to engulf him. There would be a moment of near-panic, shared by his audience; finally he would get them back onto the desk, in a struggle that had plainly cost him something, where they quietened down a little in chaotic heaps, their secrets still untold. "I expect you know the name already," he would confide hopefully to his audience. Perhaps some of them did. But the contrast with the confident, extrovert lecturing style of his old mentor I. A. Richards could not have been larger, and Richards' own bafflement with Empson, in their long years of estrangement, was memorable. "I wish him articulacy," he once told me, with the air of one who preferred not to say more. Richards, who adored lecturing, left an audience happy, if not always enlightened. Empson was as unpredictable as an unexploded bomb.

Sometimes there was no explosion at all. Sometimes, when he took a platform, nothing happened, or nothing you could fathom. At other times, whether in classroom or in private

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conversation, he would explode, and the force could be shattering. In the 1930s, at a dinner at Hanoi in French Indo-China, as it then was, he remarked to Graham Hough, an old friend, shortly after the death of D. H. Lawrence: "You know, I think I see what Lawrence's novels are about. They are about *coming* at the same time," adding even more disconcertingly: "I have once or twice managed it myself." No doubt that refers to Birkin's complaints in *Women in Love* (1920) about Ursula's sexual appetite and his disappointment at not achieving a simultaneous climax. That was a private conversation; but Empson could be alarming, too, on highly formal occasions. A widow who had rashly given her consent to his delivering a pulpit address at her husband's funeral must have been more than shaken, along with a large and respectable congregation, to hear him remark casually of the deceased: "I first met him in a brothel—he took a very sporting attitude to brothels."

The first talk I ever heard, then, was a fitting prelude. It included short poems passionately uttered, some of them his own; an unscripted revelation that he had recently had his ears cleaned by a doctor who had wondered how he had managed to hear anything for years; and an insistence, highly unusual in the last months of Stalin's dictatorship, that people nowadays were inclined not to take his own youthful Leftism seriously enough. In that age, it will be remembered, a lot of aging men of letters were busy arguing in a desperate sort of way that they had never really believed in communism at all. Empson, alone in his generation, seemed to be worried about the reverse, as if his gaiety of manner might have led people to think him uncommitted; in fact, the title of one of his volumes of poems, *The Gathering Storm* (1940), had meant to him what it later meant to Winston Churchill who (he claimed) had borrowed it from him for a collection of anti-appeasement speeches.

But somehow, though a radical to his dying day, Empson never convinced you that he had ever quite belonged to the Left in its conventional sense, or indeed anywhere. *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), written just before Mussolini's seizure of Ethiopia and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, is a critique of Marxism, or at least of the notion of a Marxist literature, appearing at a moment when Marxist ideas were rapidly becoming fashionable; and the sheer churchiness of the Left—its easy disposition to form into

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congregations of the faithful and to accept direction from a priestly caste of commissars—must always have seemed repulsive to him, though like Richards he welcomed the Communist victory in China in 1949. "I quite saw why they would want to do it," I recall his remarking, telling how he had witnessed the Communist entry into Beijing in that year, led by a woman riding a horse—an event little noticed by the local inhabitants, he reported, who were well used to being conquered by then and saw nothing epoch-making about it. Empson's fellow-travelling was always decidedly more detached than Richards'—"I'm a great admirer of his," Richards would say during Mao's dictatorship, in no doubt about which side he was on. Empson was on no side, and it is a question whether any political cause would have known what to do with him. He walked alone.

If there was a defining theme to his Oxford talk in 1952, it was anti-Modernism. This was the first time I ever heard a considered case made against T. S. Eliot and Paul Valéry by anyone who was not an old (or young) fogey, and the experience was memorable. Empson had first met Eliot as a Cambridge undergraduate in 1926, while Eliot was giving the Clark lectures there on the school of Donne. Empson did not attend the lectures, on the single and simple ground that he went to none at all. But he had been impressed, in the year before Eliot announced his adherence to Anglicanism, by his serious air in conversation with much younger men, and by his ability to listen to questions and to answer them. Deprived soon after of a Fellowship at Magdalene College for sexual activities which today would excite little or no remark, Empson moved to London to finish *Seven Types* and renewed his acquaintance with Eliot there, horrified by his religious conversion but too deeply indebted to his critical mind ever to allow himself to speak or write against him.

He could speak against obscurity, however, especially obscurity of a wilful kind, and a consistent failure to make a point. The trouble with Eliot and Valéry, he told his Oxford audience, not to mention Ezra Pound, was that in the years in and around the First World War they had devised a poetic language in which it is all but impossible to say anything. "I have just been to south-west France," he explained, finding himself on the very coast that was the theme of Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin* (1922). "In fact it's quite

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an interesting place—there is no fresh water there, and a shipwrecked sailor could die of thirst." Then he looked contemptuous. "That's why it's called the sea cemetery—but you could read and re-read Valéry's poem and never know." The point was characteristically radical, and an Oxford literary audience brought up to revere Eliot and Valéry shifted uneasily in their seats. Empson had let off his little bomb.

The attack on Modernism has since become associated with the names of Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis, and it is curious to reflect that Empson got there first. It was rather like him to get there first and to persevere longest, and beneath the mask of whimsy his commitments were passionate. "People are wrong," he once said when I asked why he kept on writing, "and they need to be told it." Even his political radicalism, though inconstant in detail, was constant in its intensity. He did not mellow with age, though aware that some of the ideals of his youth, like state welfare, had become tarnished with misuse. He was derisive, for example, about tramps who moved into a National Health Service hospital near his home in north London, camping there for weeks and accepting free meals in bed at the hands of charitable ladies; but it was not clear that nonsense like that caused him to give up the notion of universal welfare. He was rather against ratting, as he called the abandonment of ideals. Old friends at school and college, he would recall with some bitterness, had often ratted. He had been a boy at Winchester College, for example, with John Sparrow, known to later generations as a pillar of the conservative establishment and Warden of All Souls College in Oxford, and it was amazing to hear him talk of Sparrow as a youthful radical. Once, I recall his telling, at a speech-day at Winchester, the boy Sparrow had turned to him and asked him to stand up and look around at a large assembly of parents. Empson wonderingly did as he was told. "Now, Empson," said Sparrow, "when in years to come you are asked to appoint a Wykehamist or to overlook a fault in one, just remember what you have seen today." But now, Empson went on savagely, Sparrow after a life in Oxford had turned into "the trusted family butler—and that is just the matter with Oxford: it turns people into trusted family butlers."

His view of the contemporary world could be equally startling. In February 1974 there was a British general election at the height of the oil crisis, coinciding with his Clark lectures in Cambridge;

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and on the day before the vote I asked him who was going to win. "The Shah of Persia," he replied promptly. Then he added: "I hope enough Liberals are elected to keep both bulls in the china shop from behaving too badly."

His world of belief had been a series of leaps and bounds—if not into moderation, at least into searching and at times uncomfortable doubt. I wish I had known him when he was young. At Winchester he was the epitome of the witty, inky schoolboy, so a contemporary once told me, rushing past in a flying gown, and he once electrified the school in a performance of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, where he played a minor devil, by suddenly and without rehearsal turning a cartwheel on stage. He was always a master of outrage, and admired it in others. Sitting a scholarship examination at Trinity College, Cambridge, he once told me, he had been vastly impressed, after his well-regulated school life, to find that someone had been sick in his college room. I. A. Richards, who corrected his undergraduate punctuation in red pencil, had no doubt he was a genius, and was happy to encourage him to write the experiments in the verbal analysis of poetry that emerged, after he moved to London, as his first book, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. His undergraduate powers of concentration were so great, Richards once told me, that friends would bang two volumes of the big Oxford English Dictionary against each other behind his head as he read on a garden seat, and he would notice nothing and read happily on. He must have been an oddly abstracted youth. A contemporary of his once told me that when he handed in some original poems to be read by the examiners of Cambridge English, who were chaired by Richards, they found them baffling and exercised the exceptional right of calling the candidate in for questioning. That was a great excitement to his friends, who waited anxiously for him in a neighboring bar. After the interview Empson arrived, calmly ordered a drink and sat down. "What did they say?" his friends asked eagerly. "They asked me what they were about, you know." "And what did you tell them?" "Beauty, you know, beauty."

His life of conviction was a mixture of constancy and flux, though it was the constancy, even the intransigence, that impressed. His second book, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), is difficult to characterize in ideological terms, like everything he wrote. Only an admirer of Freud and Marx could have written it,

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but it leaves the reader subtly skeptical of both. *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951) was dedicated to I. A. Richards as "the source of all ideas in this book, even the minor ones arrived at by disagreeing with him," but that is amiable rather than convincing, since the book is based on lexical sources—most notably the Oxford dictionary that had failed to distract him from his reading in youth—and it has nothing much to do with Richards or his views. The grandiose ambition of Basic English to show that everything can be said in 800-odd words must have lapsed in his mind at about the time the book appeared, and it is subject to one overriding and insoluble disability: that whatever its uses as a second language, no native speaker of English is likely to remember in conversation which words he is allowed, in talking Basic, to use.

It was a game that did not work. When I visited Ronald Crane in Chicago in 1957, he told me that Empson had been there several years before, on his way home from China.

> He sat where you are sitting now and told me he had been teaching Basic English to the Chinese. "Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that you believe everything can be said in less than a thousand words?" Empson said he did. "I challenge you to pick a book off that shelf at random, open it and translate it into Basic English."

Empson put out a hand blindly and, as chance had it, pulled out Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria.* He opened it at a venture and read silently for a minute or two. Then he raised his eyes. "Of course," he said humbly, "it does rather make nonsense of Coleridge."

The great enemy, however, was Christianity, which he hated with an intensity that never waned. That intensity lay at the heart of his theory of history. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment had doubted miracles, Victorian "honest doubt" had accepted only the humanity of Christ. Empson went further, and rejected the Christian ethic. To worship an act of torture like the crucifixion, to believe in an afterlife of eternal punishment, can only make people worse. Religion was far more deeply flawed for him than the Enlightenment or the Victorians had ever supposed. There could be no compromise with that view, which governed his sense of individuals as well as his sense of the human past. "She's a dangerous serpent," he once remarked of Helen Gardner, whose Anglicanism deeply shocked him, "but she

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doesn't do as much harm as she would like." For all his whimsy, there could be no joking about issues like that. For two millennia and more, he believed, monotheism had been the scourge of mankind, and modern tragedies like Ireland and the Middle East showed that the curse of superstition was at best dormant but never dead. Bosnia, had he lived to see it, would have confirmed his worst fears. It is the task and duty of a teacher of literature, as he saw it, to promote infidelity, to cause young minds to doubt—to make them see, as Milton partly saw in *Paradise Lost* and as Shelley saw altogether, that a world driven by the idea of a retributive God is a world riding to its own destruction. Not many teachers of literature believe, in their hearts, that they are doing anything that much affects what people think and do, and critical theory has recently encouraged the view that fiction and poetry teach nothing and change nothing. Empson thought otherwise. He believed that one could make a difference to the world, and no doubt he did.

What survives in memory, however, is less a prophet than a figure given to causing endless shock and surprise. "I've known you for a long time, Bill," I recall a contemporary of his remarking when they were both in their seventies, referring to the half-century that had elapsed since their student days, "and I still don't feel I really know you." Empson merely grunted. It was because he remained unknowable that he was a constant source of surprise. When it fell to me to tell the same friend of Empson's death in 1984, he summed up the sense of irreparable loss that many felt. "The death of William," he said after a silent moment, "leaves such a vacancy in the world."

He is one of the few, the very few, from the Age of Criticism that reached its climax in the 1950s whose works are still read, and read for the purpose for which they were written. *Argufying* (1987), which appeared three years after his death and collected his essays and reviews from as far back as 1928, is perhaps the liveliest gathering of critical prose in English in its century; and his prose, like his verse, lives as far more than a curiosity of time and place. He had a gift for seeing a point and summarizing a view more rapidly than anyone I have ever known. Intellection was seemingly effortless to him: he saw things in a flash. Once, on my remarking that I had just come from a seminar on music, he

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summed up the history of European music in its tonal phase in a sentence or two, noting the extreme brevity of that tradition compared with a literature that stretches back to Homer. His writings are briskly intuitive in a similar way. In the first winter of the war, which he spent mostly in Boston, he noticed something about America that strikes an instant chord of recognition: the fondness of its public figures to utter the words "I believe" in a tone and in a context suggesting that to want something is to have it. That was in an article called "Passing through USA," which he wrote for Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* in June 1940. Americans, he remarked, "easily feel that belief produces its object," which is why they think advertising a good thing even when it tells lies, since it helps the economy. If never exactly pro-American, he was contemptuous of that state of mind, surprisingly common among European and Asian intellectuals, that thinks anti-Americanism an adequate substitute for political judgement. "An Indian lady came to see me last week," he once told me, "and talked for two hours about the wickedness of the whites, and how the Americans are trying to starve India, and how they have castrated three-quarters of the male population of Puerto Rico." Then he paused to take breath, but only for an instant. "All I can say is the other quarter must be working like horses."

He was not a sage, in fact or in pretension, and had no ambition to appear a saint. He was a bohemian gentleman who, after an early training in mathematics, had entered literary studies as an amateur, and he kept the freedom of the amateur to the end of his days; worrying, with some reason, that an unquenchable propensity to be flippant might persuade the world that he did not mean what he said or that what he said might not be worth attending to. His sense of fun sometimes betrayed him, as he knew. Perhaps there is a paradox there that speaks for the British genius in our age. If people are wrong, as he put it, they need to be told it. On the other hand there is a social demand not to be a scold or a bore, and the long revisions that delayed his last collections of essays till after his death were largely induced by his attempts to lighten the mass of his critical writing and to entertain as well as instruct. After 1961 he never saw a book through the press. Revision claimed him. He had to revise until his prose ceased to bore even him. "I still have to put in the careless ease," he once remarked, sitting by the pond in his Hampstead garden,

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when I reproached him gently for not collecting his essays. "The careless ease always goes in last." It is as good a remark as you will hear about the art of exposition.

It is also a British remark. Most national traditions do not demand or even expect careless ease in their academic writers; and the ironic flippancy he loved, though often a joy, can also be a trap. It is the English vice; and when the French, in speaking of *le vice anglais*, mean masochism and cold baths they miss the point. The real English vice is whimsy. Empson was a master of whimsy, or perhaps whimsy was the master of him. It was there early and late. In the earliest surviving review he ever wrote, collected in *Argufying* as "Curds and Whey" from an undergraduate journal of May 1928, he wrote that poetry is "written with the sort of joke you find in hymns," which is at once marvellously funny and marvellously iconoclastic. There are no jokes in hymns, however funny they may unintentionally be. Empson's mind was devastating, and it devastated at high speed. To read him, to listen to him, was like standing by the roadside and watching a racing car go by and out of sight in an instant.

His sophistication was breathtaking. Those who love to shock do not always trouble to say what they think or think what they say, but with Empson the distinction did not arise. His beliefs were genuinely shocking. Nietzsche thought God was dead; Empson thought He was evil, and that it made you evil to believe in Him. That is easily more radical than Nietzsche, and I remember shocking some radicals in Berkeley, California in the 1960s, who cheerfully wore "God is dead" buttons and thought nothing to the Left alien to them, by expounding his views. They found it hard to think that anyone could seriously believe such things, which was Empson's problem throughout his life. Because he was endlessly funny, not everyone thought he was serious. Can one prophesy against God, or anything, in a style that moves the reader to giggle, to gasp or to guffaw? I merely ask, being uncertain of the answer. In a land where conversation is one of the performative arts, Empson saw it as his unceasing duty to amuse, and did. Other prophets in history, such as Jeremiah and his own favorite Old Testament author, the second Isaiah, behaved otherwise, and only time will show which lasts better.

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DEAN FLOWER

Frank Tuohy and the Poetics of Depression

While browsing in the poetry section of a Manhattan bookstore last June, on the day of the Bennett Award ceremonies, Frank Tuohy found himself addressed by a tall Japanese boy, a college student apparently, who asked—after deferential preliminaries—could he recommend a poem that was, please, very depressing? Indeed he could. Tuohy promptly extracted Philip Larkin's *Collected Poems* from the shelf and advised the boy to read "Aubade." Imagine the two of them standing there in a Barnes & Noble, one reading, the other waiting and watching, as Larkin's five stanzas on "the dread / Of dying, and being dead" cast their pall. Then the boy looked up, his eyes glowing with appreciation, and said, "That's *very* depressing!"

When he told the story at lunch that day, Frank Tuohy's eyes glowed with appreciation too. Having lived in Tokyo and taught English at Waseda University for three years in the 1960s, he was unsurprised by the boy's enthusiasm for the bleak and despairing. Quite typical of that age and class, he assured us. But I think the experience pleased him more than he could say. It struck a deep responsive chord. Note how quickly he thought of the Larkin poem, as if it were already ranked Most Depressing on a mental list he keeps. The boy could not have asked his question of a better person.

Tuohy's gifts as a writer depend fundamentally on a quality that will not appeal at once to many readers: his pervasive skepticism. Things tend not to turn out well in a Tuohy story. The pleasant becomes unpleasant and the unpleasant becomes awful. Trying to do something nice—say to help a blind man on a railway journey (as in "The White Stick") or to reward a friendly nurse with dinner and theater tickets (as in "A Special Relationship")—leads to anger, hostility, and pain. A naive woman at a cocktail party (in "Love to Patsy") reminisces happily about mutual

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friends, then it dawns on the man listening that she is not quite up-to-date on the once-glamorous Wickershams, who have run into a few problems:

> She thinks of John and Patsy as continuing elsewhere, step by step, as she and her husband have been continuing. Whereas Patsy has come to the end. When all the business about Victoria started, Patsy took [their son] Edmund to a hotel in Ross-on-Wye, or perhaps it was Hereford, and killed him with sleeping pills, and tried to kill herself. Luckily she died in hospital. People said that she was mad.

Not that all Tuohy narratives end in death and disaster. Rather more often they end in a carefully modulated frustration, humiliation, despair, embarrassment, or impasse. Tuohy has devoted his career, in fact, to the fine calibration of such pains as these.

Skepticism is felt too in the way Tuohy's characters are drawn. There is seldom anyone to sympathize with. Even victimized point-of-view characters are held at a distance. The American academic types in "Evening in Connecticut" are all believably awful, but the Englishman who is their honored guest at dinner and who will be their writer-in-residence in the fall—is sycophantic, blundering, and drunk. While the wife and mother feel no grief at all in "A Floral Tribute," the protagonist wonders how soon after his father's death he may have sex with his wife again. So you learn not to trust anyone in Tuohy's world, nor can you expect anything to turn out well. Now that may not seem to be much fun at first. Normally, people do not read fiction in order to bring on gloom and depression. But consider this: I have learned recently that research has been done on the behavior patterns of monkeys who are depressive. It turns out not to be such a negative trait. While depressive monkeys experience more anxiety and fear than others, they are also much more vigilant. They *notice more* than their happy, well-adjusted peers. Their awareness of threat, of potential enemies and impending dangers, is finer. They are in fact monkeys upon whom nothing is lost. They have in abundance—to echo Henry James again—"the imagination of disaster." And by having that, they protect the group. So perhaps we had better reconsider, primates that we are, the positive value of Frank Tuohy's doubt, suspicion, and all-pervading skepticism.

Tuohy seems to have addressed something of this very point at

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the conclusion of "Love to Patsy." As the cocktail party ends, the naive woman still thinks the Wickershams are living happily ever after, and the narrator offers her these unspoken words:

> . . .you will never realize how I have been protecting you from unhappiness. Because of me you'll be able to eat a good lunch, with your nice booming husband, and the children too, if you haven't packed them off to boarding schools. I'm presenting you with this afternoon, for leafing through the *Sunday Express* and tidying in the garden and taking the spaniels for a run. All this has been in my gift, and I've bestowed it upon you with all the grace I could manage, which admittedly wasn't a great deal. Yet you're offended with me—you think I'm unfriendly and superior.

Tuohy sees himself as a writer in a position like this narrator's: in the midst of happy, well-adjusted peers, chattering away at cocktail parties, he has knowledge of the darkest sort—in this case, of a wife so savagely depressed by her husband's affair that she kills their child and then herself. But such knowledge isn't wanted, isn't even recognized. While the narrator's "gift" protects by not speaking, the author's gift does the opposite: it offers to protect by uttering the very worst. This may seem a bit far-fetched at first, but listen for Tuohy's voice covertly addressing the reader in the last two sentences above. I hear him offering an apology for inadequate grace, a rueful admission of his gift for unhappiness, and an ironic recognition that his motives as a writer have been misjudged.

Skepticism underlies Tuohy's other, perhaps more widely-praised concerns, his acute sense of social or cultural differences, for example. Abysses open up between his characters, no matter what their good intentions, when they come up against differences in class, in role, in manners, in taste. In Tuohy's fiction strangers get acquainted only to become even stranger to one another. Sometimes, when their roles are played out, there is nothing left for them to do but die. That is what happens to Miss Featherstone, the former headmistress of a school in "A War of Liberation," when there is no way left for her to be anyone. Waiters, chauffeurs, nannies, gardeners, retired colonels, serving persons of all kinds appear throughout Tuohy's fiction, insisting on the irremediable differences between people. In "The Palladian Bridge," a schoolboy who reads poetry finds himself unable to speak to the servant girl he's attracted to, so powerful are the

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prohibitions his parents have instilled in him. That Palladian bridge where they meet represents a restrictive traditional order he cannot change. It bridges nothing, while in the vast blue sky overhead the distant bombers of World War II, epitomizing themselves the failure of human understanding, "catch the sun from time to time like trout fry in a shallow water." A delectable image, typical of Tuohy at his merciless best.

When Tuohy moves into the realm of international differences, his skepticism is even more authoritative. It is well to remember here that, after his education at Kings College, Cambridge, he taught at the University of Turku in Finland from 1947 to 1948, was a professor of English at the University of São Paulo in Brazil from 1950 to 1956, then at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, from 1958 to 1960, and then at Waseda University in Tokyo from 1964 to 1967. He has also been a writer-in-residence at Purdue (1970–71, 1976, and 1980), at Texas A & M, and at Rikkyo University, Tokyo, in 1983. Note too that in 1970 he wrote a concise monograph on Portugal, and in 1976 a finely-detailed biography of Yeats (Tuohy's father was Irish). Clearly, he has not only traveled, but lived in many a foreign culture long enough to know it well.

Many of his best short stories emerge from these experiences. The awful comedies played out between visiting English professors and their Polish or Japanese colleagues and students are only surpassed by tragedies made of the same elements. Before you try for a Fulbright lectureship to Tokyo or Biala Gora—or anywhere, for that matter—read Tuohy's powerful story "The Broken Bridge" about a Japanese student who must act a role in Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*. Unable to play Eddie, which requires "a man kissing another man," the student commits suicide. The play's director is a scruffy know-it-all American academic who has "fallen for the intricacies of Japanese culture," and become a connoisseur of Kabuki and Noh. But when it comes to directing Miller, he insists on modern Western sophistication, bringing out the homosexual subtext. "You should just see my Eddie—he's a living doll." The narrator of the story fails to worry much about what might happen: "in the casual comedy of American-Japanese relations, I reflected, mutual incomprehension has a cushioning effect and nothing is ever as disastrous as it seems at first sight." How wrong he is. (One of Tuohy's favorite

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messages is that things are likely to be *even worse* than they seem at first sight.) By the end of the story the narrator, who was the Japanese boy's teacher, knows that he failed to understand a desperate call for help, that he in fact contributed by mistake to the boy's humiliation, that now even to mention the boy's name in class is a serious mistake, so contemptuous have his peers become of him. The story suggests much about the Japanese, who giggle without mirth and blush without embarrassment, about their "intense fury of the will which hides behind all the decorum and docility," about their language which has no verb for 'hope.' But it suggests even more about the failure, the inability, and often the deep unwillingness, of Westerners to understand.

Looking at Tuohy's international stories generally, one can only admire how evenhanded they are. Conventional English types are almost constantly criticized—for pomposity, greed, and miserliness of spirit, mainly—and Americans are almost always shown to be spoiled and shallow. But then, they are up against some exceptionally stolid Japanese, corrupt Brazilians, snobbish and deluded Poles, and oafish Russians. That may sound dismissive, and Tuohy sometimes is, but he is seldom so categorically scathing as, say, Evelyn Waugh with his preposterous colonials, nor so sourly judgmental as Graham Greene tends to be with his burnt-out cases. The note Tuohy strikes more often with his gallery of repellent and unattractive national types is a reluctant pathos. Just when you are savoring the deserved humiliation of some nasty Polish youth ("The Student") or the plight of an adulterous English husband befuddled in a Japanese brothel ("Nocturne with Neon Lights"), some shift of focus or suggestion of phrase forces you into an unwilling empathy. The appalling Imogen, wife of a doddering old poet in "A Summer Pilgrim," who drags their delicate Japanese visitor around the English garden and forces her to eat lamb (soon to be regurgitated), seems to be one of those Tuohy characters you ought to hate. But toward the end he draws attention to her "remarkably stagey and self-conscious" movements and the way "her voice ranged up and down the scale, even becoming a little shrill." Only then do you realize how desperate she is, and powerless. No cruelty is forgiven here, but Imogen has become human and cannot be so easily dismissed.

I have not yet sufficiently emphasized how well-written Tuohy's

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short stories are, how lean and incisive, how unpretentious and technically austere. He seems to have imitated Joyce's effort in *Dubliners* to adopt a style of "scrupulous meanness." Yet there runs through it a very different, and wonderful, sense of humor. You learn to wait for the moments when Tuohy breaks his vow of reticence and offers some remark, like

> The people I knew in my childhood were not, perhaps, happy, but they dosed their unhappiness with little nips of self-esteem.

Or:

> He has the air of a stable boy, which is probably all right because he isn't one.

Or this passage, about two women who were chums at school:

> They remember . . . how one would often guess the other's thoughts, and how they had often begun to say precisely the same thing at the same moment. They think of this as an example, not of limited mental resources, but of mutual affection and sympathy.

But the sense of humor runs deeper than that. It might best be conveyed by suggesting that when you read some of these stories, the experience seems bleak in the extreme, unrelieved by any sort of hope or joy, but when you tell someone else the plot you both explode in laughter. Such a story is "Fingers in the Door." Even the title makes you wince. It's told from the point of view of a sixteen-year-old girl whose birthday entertainment is a trip to London and the theater. At the moment of departure the train compartment holds the daughter, reading a trashy novel, her Mummy who is anxious about appearances, and her Daddy, a rather tired, put-upon figure who has just arrived with magazines and newspapers for the ladies. Then there is a stranger, an elderly woman in "a grimly determined hat" who makes the mother acutely uncomfortable. When the compartment door is slammed closed by a "blithe railwayman" on the platform, Daddy's fingers are smashed. He falls to the floor, writhing in unbelievable pain. What happens next? Mummy is embarrassed, apologizes to the elderly woman, "I am sure it was my husband's fault," and glares unforgivingly at him. The daughter is furious that her special day has now been spoiled. Daddy, wishing that they "would give him

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permission to yell out," remembers that women are present and stifles his anguish. And the elderly woman is appalled. "Your husband is in pain [she says]. Aren't you going to do anything about it?" For a moment she seems to be the only one with any sense. Then she announces airily, "I feel I am in the way, and so I'll move to another carriage." To the injured man she confides helpfully, before departing, "You have all my sympathy." This is high comedy indeed, and not only comedy. It reminds me of the reference in another Tuohy story to a remark made by Chekhov: "whereas Tragedy is life seen close at hand, Comedy is life seen at a distance." How skillfully in his best stories Tuohy moves from one distance to the other or even manages both at once.

Why then are these stories now entirely out of print? His first collection, *The Admiral and the Nuns*, appeared in 1962, the title story having won the Katherine Mansfield Short Story Prize in 1960. Then came a second collection, *Fingers in the Door*, in 1970, and a third, *Live Bait and Other Stories*, in 1979. None of them sold very well in this country, so they do not turn up in used bookstores; my guess is that most readers found them too depressing. When Holt, Rinehart and Winston issued *The Collected Stories* in 1984, that seemed to mark the end of Tuohy's career. No reviewer was willing to praise much more than his shrewd social observation and his mastery of technique. Almost all of them, however, called attention to his grim view of life. And they have done so repeatedly over the years, frequently to complain about it. Robert Moss wrote in 1970, for example, "Too often he locks his characters into impossibly grim situations. . . . Tuohy's pessimism is too insistent; it is tortured out of characters and circumstances where it does not rightfully belong." After many paragraphs of praise Kingsley Shorter wrote, also in 1970, "Yet one has doubts. Nobody *has* to see the world in terms of such unrelieved gloom." He went on to suggest "a certain vivisectionist relish" in Tuohy's morbidity, and even a certain "pornography of social unease," i.e., being excessively fascinated by the misfortunes of others.

Tuohy's work has elicited such resistance from the very beginning. Reviewing his first novel, *The Animal Game* (1957), Richard Horchler wrote, "too sad to be funny and too mean to be tragic, [the novel] is in the end only depressing." Peter Deane announced in a review of *The Ice Saints* (1965), Tuohy's third novel,

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it was "one of the most depressing novels I have read." He claimed that Rose, the protagonist, "sees as many gloomy and impoverished sights and meets as many oppressed and cynical Poles as her visa permits." The language of all these complaints is revealing. Note how often the blame for "grim situations" and the reader's depression is placed on the author rather than on the world he reflects. As if the depressing realities of life could not be—without Tuohy's help—excessively painful, gratuitously depressing, "too sad" or "too mean" or "too insistent." Note too in the critics' language an element of stridency and panic. "Nobody *has* to" see things Tuohy's way, says Shorter, whistling in the dark. And by calling it a sort of "pornography" he strains to deny and condemn its appeal. These are "impossibly grim situations," says Horchler, fending off their very real possibility. "Only depressing," says Deane, as if that safely dismissed Tuohy's powerful effect.

He seems to have sought that effect from the very beginning. The first sentence of his first novel, set in Brazil, begins, "Far away, on the precarious underside of the world . . ." A few pages later in *The Animal Game* Tuohy presents an appalling scene: hundreds of animals stranded for days because of a railway strike are suffering, dying, killing one another while "a slow whirlwind of circling vultures" descends. But before giving any of this explanation, Tuohy renders the experience as a sourceless totality, in terms that suggest a key signature for his entire work.

> It was a sound of agony, the noise of pain in abstraction, without cause, as though the air were screaming. A noise no one could hear without running—either towards it to help, or away in fear and terror.

It is remarkable, to say the least, to discover a writer so fully in possession of his theme in the first moments of his career. The novel fails to cohere effectively, partly because its two protagonists—a wealthy, dissatisfied Brazilian woman and an unassertive young Englishman—are so half-hearted, partly because its various lesser characters, memorably sketched, have so little to do with one another.

Tuohy's second novel, *The Warm Nights of January* (1960), is also set in Brazil, Rio this time instead of São Paulo, and is another attempt to imitate the manner of casual recklessness and despair that Hemingway made fashionable in *The Sun Also Rises*. Its

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protagonist is Bella, a middle-aged French woman who takes up with a young black man from the slums of Rio. Its most memorable scenes dramatize Bella's inability to defend herself against her selfish lover, her manipulative friends, her unwanted guests—all of whom pressure her the more because her denials are so ambivalent or apologetic. In a quasi-suicide she nearly drowns, but neither she nor the novel seem able to acknowledge that she is deeply depressed. Alas, the book should have been more depressing! Still, when you compare it to the falsities about love between Rio's rich and poor, white and black, cooked up by John Updike in *Brazil* recently, Tuohy's work seems far superior.

Tuohy's best novel is *The Ice Saints*, and of course it is his most scrupulously depressing. Rose Nicholson, its English protagonist, goes to Poland to visit her unhappy sister Janet, who is married to a talentless university instructor, Witold Rudowski. Their miserable poverty is made even more hopeless by the endless coercions and betrayals of the country's Communist regime. Rose brings dangerous news: that the Rudowskis' son Tadeusz has just inherited, from the Nicholson estate, a sizable fortune. Her idea is to rescue fourteen-year-old Tadeusz from his doomed little life in Poland and bring him to England, but can she persuade his parents to agree? And can the inheritance be kept secret until the boy is beyond reach of the government? Rose's difficulties only increase as she tries to help. Played out against repeated images of a hopelessly gray and depleted landscape, her good intentions are repeatedly disheartened and depleted themselves. Tuohy exercises a Jamesian patience in detailing the way a grim situation becomes hopeless, and a hopeless one turns into a disaster. Near the end of the story the author emerges from his usual self-effacing silence to issue this stunning description:

> The train was slowly proceeding through a marshy landscape near the remains of a prehistoric lake village. From time to time its whistle gave out a ringing, lacustrine cry, the sort of cry that wild fauna might have emitted across these Tennysonian meres on every rainy afternoon since the Ice Age. Rain spat again and again on the windows. Today was one of the chill weeping days in the early part of May, the days of the Ice Saints, St. Pancras, St. Servace and St. Boniface, whose arrival affords a reminder that all is by no means well with the year. If you had confidence in the spring, your trust was misplaced: it will let you down. And if you are a pessimist you can give the satisfied snort

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of those whose worst fears are justified, and continue toting the burden of existence a little further on.

The tone here is anguished and inconsolable. There is no "satisfied snort" in Tuohy's poetics. He is closer at such moments to Hopkins' "No worse there is none," or to Larkin's "nothing more terrible, nothing more true." That is what makes all of his work worth reading. He described it cheerfully a few months ago as "the element of 'Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes' in my writing."

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Matriarchal Mysteries

AFTER THE CELEBRATIONS MARKING THE CENTENNIAL of Doris Humphrey's birth, the identity of this modern dance pioneer seems less clear than ever. For a decade or so around the 1930s, Humphrey and the company she founded with Charles Weidman were major players in the effort to translate American creativity into American art forms, distinct from the European models that had dominated our culture in the pre-modern period. During World War II Humphrey's visibility began to decline. Arthritis of the hip forced her off the stage, and the company that had been her choreographic instrument disbanded. Humphrey stubbornly refused to give up, and soon formed a new alliance with her protégé José Limón, who was starting his own company. Even though she served as artistic director and choreographer, she receded into the background, eclipsed in the public view by the charismatic Limón. Since her death in 1958, her dances have passed into that mythological state where we deposit significant choreographic achievements after their creators are no longer around to animate them.

Humphrey's influence on modern dance equalled that of her contemporary Martha Graham. But Graham's work underwent continuous updating and cosmetizing, and was almost never mounted outside of her own company. No record of her choreographic process has reached the public except for some poetic notes and mementos. Five years after her death, the repertory is still zealously controlled and proclaimed authentic, as if Graham were supervising it from the grave. Ironically, the now almost forgotten Humphrey felt a greater responsibility to her posterity. She made sure that as many of her dances as possible were notated and filmed; she liberally gave permission for others to teach and perform them. Both the notated scores and the living griots of her choreography now coax Humphrey reconstructions from a wide range of companies. But there's no central idea of what constitutes the Humphrey technique or the Humphrey performing style. No company exists that does Humphrey exclusively, and no single artistic judgment shapes or tests the quality of this diffuse repertory.

It was essentially this lack of a center that was put on display during the centennial. In New York during the fall (Humphrey's birthday was 17 October 1895), we got a week of heterogeneous, overlapping performances, a few pieces in the Limón company's season at the Joyce Theater a month after the main events, a photo exhibition at the Dance Collection of the Lincoln Center Library, and a two-day academic conference sponsored

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by the Congress on Research in Dance and Teachers College at Columbia University. One lost, late Humphrey work (*Fantasy and Fugue*, 1952) was resurrected from archival material by two different directors, and the resulting productions looked like two different dances.

The centennial might have been an opportunity to strengthen or redefine Humphrey's contribution to dance, but for most of the public, the mythic veils remained in place. I don't feel any closer to understanding her as a choreographer than I was before. In fact, the celebration raised again, in palpable form, some of my biggest questions about the nature of dance preservation.

The centennial performances varied in every way imaginable, from the dancers' level of proficiency, to the interpretations of Humphrey style, to the inner workings of the reconstruction process. Although Humphrey's choreographing career lasted three decades, the bulk of the performances dated from the first five of those years. From 1928, when she and Charles Weidman left the Denishawn company, until the mid-thirties, when she had found her choreographic voice, Humphrey made small, didactic pieces, each serving to explore some problem she was working out about the body, music, phrasing, gesture, how to organize choreographic space. These early works were studies, conceptual essays, rather than major choreographic statements. Brief, sometimes little more than fragments, they used very simple movement elements to spin out a problem and effect its resolution. *Soaring* and *Valse Caprice* actually date from the Denishawn vaudeville days, and featured girl dancers engaged in decorative trivialities with a big silk scarf. In *Air for the G String* and several other pieces, Humphrey worked with baroque music to test out how to set movement in formal patterns without literally duplicating the music. *The Call*, *Breath of Fire*, and *Two Ecstatic Themes* were solos in which she expressed emotional themes through abstract movement designs. *Water Study*, perhaps her first masterpiece, treated a large group of women as a natural organism, surging and flowing across a silent space on currents of their own breath.

These dances, like the things Graham was experimenting with around the same time, are like gems—spare, elemental, riveting in their purity, and often starkly beautiful. Only the postmoderns of the sixties and seventies, Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, Laura Dean, worked with such deliberate rigor, and all of them, like their modern dance mothers, gradually got more elaborate, more ambitious. To imagine Doris Humphrey's choreography only in terms of her first works is to see an arrested career.

Early Humphrey takes well to modern production values—silky costumes, dramatic lighting, high intensity dancing. But however effectively these works can be rendered, they portray a choreographer without much sophistication. They only foreshadow the movement complexity, the subtle phrasing and counterpoint, and the spatial ingenuity Humphrey later achieved. Modest in scale and technical difficulty, they often serve as training pieces for student dancers. Because

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many have been notated, the additional resource of a score presents an unusual opportunity for a dance student to experience a work by a major artist. Apart from Humphrey in notation, modern dance provides no equivalent of a piano student's Bach Inventions. But it's the aggregate of these early studies, and their frequent interpretation onstage by students, that gives people the idea Humphrey is a textbook choreographer, good for training dancers but maybe not up to big challenges.

Humphrey's mature work fell into several phases; unlike Graham, she never arrived at a single format that would serve successive ideas. Her continual search for new choreographic themes and approaches is another reason we can't easily label her achievement. Around 1935 she began her *New Dance Trilogy*, a sweeping essay on the state of society. Each of its three parts was framed in a different style but linked to the others by certain movement themes. The satire *Theatre Piece*, lampooning the competitive life of sports, commerce, and the stage, was lost after its initial seasons and has resisted several attempts at retrieval. For the centennial, the other two sections were revived but performed separately. Humphrey-Weidman itself never managed to stage all three parts on one program, but a more coordinated centennial effort might have allowed us to see the surviving two together.

Instead, *With My Red Fires* was performed by a company directed by Mino Nicolas during his week-long Humphrey tribute at Pace Downtown Theater, and the Deborah Carr dancers mounted *New Dance* for one of two gala performances at LaGuardia High School. Also during the Nicolas series, Jennifer Muller's company showed the last section of *New Dance*, Variations and Conclusion. All three of these performances refuted the idea that Humphrey dance is easy to do. *Red Fires* looked impressive with its large blocks of dancers, surging implacably across the stage. Humphrey was above everything a genius at group choreography, and in *Red Fires* she posed a huge anonymous ensemble against three solo figures: a young couple and the girl's domineering mother. The group initially honors the couple in a kind of marriage rite, and is later transformed into a lynch mob by the vindictive mother. More than telling a story, Humphrey was also metaphorically cautioning against the dehumanizing influence of tyrants.

For Humphrey, movement was never realistic. The real drama and the deeper meanings of narrative were embedded in formal movement patterns. This restraint, now somehow read as an unseemly objectivity, allowed her to create ensemble choreography of enormous compositional interest. *New Dance*, the culmination of the trilogy, was intended to resolve the conflicts and foibles of the other two parts in a movement scenario as intricate and nonrepresentational as a piece of music. Deborah Carr's dancers looked stiff and out of their depth in trying to master the speed, the meshes of rhythmic interplay, the suspending and plunging body shapes, but I was stunned at the end to find myself caught up in the triumphant unity of the group. Somehow the submerging of

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individual ego into group celebration, which was Humphrey's utopian message, found its realization in the doing of the dance for this occasion. The movement wasn't quite there, but the *dance* was.

When Jennifer Muller's company attempted the Variations and Conclusion at Pace, it wasn't only the small size of her group that shredded the choreography. Muller, a third generation Humphreyite (she studied at Juilliard and danced with José Limón in the years just after Humphrey's death), has developed certain aspects of Humphrey technique for her own choreography, especially the juicy, sexy three-dimensionality of the body as it scoops and spirals on a breath rhythm. But the body comprises only one aspect of Humphrey's style. Muller's dancers couldn't keep to the precise rhythms of this glorious finale, so Humphrey's complex counterpoint blurred out. They seemed afraid to go off balance, depriving the audience of the excitement of Humphrey's "fall and recovery," a concept of risk and propulsion that dares the dancers to tilt and flirt with gravity, then spin away from danger in a resilient recharge of energy.

I applaud those who engaged in this brief Humphrey resurgence, but to pay her the best tribute, her choreography has to be rescued from the stodgy images projected by half-prepared dancers. This underestimating of the demands of her technique is as much a deterrent to credible reconstructions as the questions of interpretation that are more often debated. Ray Cook, the notator/reconstructor who served as artistic director for the LaGuardia performances, has argued that even when dances are committed to notation they must be freshly envisioned to maintain their vitality. Directors don't agree, however, how far it's permissible to go when they put themselves in place of an absent choreographer. How to know what she would consider appropriate? When do their instincts subtly betray or even violate the changes she herself would make in a new production?

Should we demand that original costuming be replicated in the name of authenticity even if the originals were frumpy or unflattering? Should steps be simplified if the dancers can't execute them? A thousand decisions like this confront the director of an archival reconstruction. But there are bigger ones. Gil Wright Miller of Denison University undertook a renovation of Humphrey's *Day on Earth* (1947) from the standpoint of psychological motivation. The dance had been notated, so Miller felt there was no argument about the steps. What she aimed at was to explore the four characters in the dance: a man, the love of his youth, his wife, and their child. Miller and the dancers developed a narrative for the dance. They worked on expressive elements of each character from the point of view of Rudolf Laban's dynamic combinations, which then got lapped into the choreographic patterns.

What happened in performance was curious. The marvelous contrasts between the characters, built so carefully and nonliterally by Humphrey, evaporated under a bland evocation of "states." I guess it was worth seeing

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this happen, if only to demonstrate that Humphrey knew what she was doing and her work doesn't need additional aids to comprehension.

Both Ray Cook and Mino Nicolas revived *Fantasy and Fugue* (Mozart), Cook for Repertory Dance Theater of Salt Lake City, and Nicolas for students at Brigham Young University. A silent film exists of the Limón company's original-cast performance in the first and last movements, and both directors used that as their main text. Nicolas simply omitted the missing middle section, but Ray Cook made his own choreographic interpretation, using whatever movement could be recollected by Pauline Koner, one of the original dancers, and elicited from other sources. Cook's solution was very effective and could point the way for other works previously thought to have too many gaps to bring back. But Nicolas' Brigham Young group were dressed in contemporary dance clothes rather than Cook's replication of the dressier originals. Cook's dance seemed to have balletic overtones. But I'd want to look at both versions several more times to decide if by 1952 Humphrey had slipped from her early, egalitarian treatment of groups into a more conventional sex stereotyping.

It would seem a simple matter to judge a revival. If it pleases the audience today, it must be worth having in repertory. But any art form needs an educated audience, especially when the artist worked in an earlier time. The public for modern dance isn't necessarily well-informed as to the differences between latter-day versions of the same choreography, nor can it easily assess how close a reconstruction comes to the spirit if not the minutiae of its original. In recent years Mino Nicolas has directed a series of companies performing Humphrey repertory. According to a reputable Toronto critic, Nicolas "probably knows [Humphrey's] work better than anyone else alive."[1] This is an exaggeration; Nicolas never knew Humphrey personally, never danced in a professional company that did her work, and doesn't list any Humphrey-Weidman or Limón proponents among his teachers. Some time ago, declaring his devotion to keeping her work alive, Nicolas acquired long-term rights to perform it from her son and executor Charles H. Woodford. He then enlisted several retired Humphrey dancers and associates to help him mount these works.

Advance publicity for the Nicolas contribution to the centennial asserted that every extant Humphrey choreography would make its appearance on this two-part series. (Another week was promised for spring 1996.) For the first round, he used a company of dancers with widely varying backgrounds, plus five additional groups which contributed a dance or two each to the repertory. Perhaps not surprisingly, Nicolas' grandiose plans didn't entirely materialize. Scheduled works were withdrawn (*Day on Earth, Partita in G Major*), sections were omitted from others, and works by choreographers associated with Humphrey filled in some of the programs.

[1] "Modern Dance Pioneer's Work Restored," by William Littler, *The Toronto Star*, June 13, 1995, p. B6.

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An undertaking this immense becomes an event in dance history whether or not it's successful, but Nicolas didn't seem overly anxious to tell us where he acquired these dances. Program notes were often vague or named so many sources one had to credit Nicolas with the final responsibility. Some of his collaborators were deceased or apparently had not looked at the dances for five years or more, even though every change of cast, every seasonal hiatus, every unconscious slurring or omission of movements endangers the integrity of a work.

Like most of the dancers and some of the reconstructors for Nicolas' project, I didn't see any Humphrey dance produced while she was alive. But I think I know what her style ought to be. It isn't dancing from the outside, for instance. Some performers seem to take her clarity in space as a directive to carve out visual shapes with no internal motivation for them. Others interpret the idea of "breath rhythm" to mean shoving their breath out in great huffs and puffs, as if to illustrate the hard work of moving. Humphrey stressed breathing in order to make sure every movement came from the core of the dancer's physicality and to focus each dancer's attention on the energy of the group as a collective force. Instigated this way, invested totally from the inside, the breath didn't need to be audible. Humphrey movement isn't illustrative. It doesn't need overexertion, dramatizing, facial expressions or gestural embellishments to convey a state of mind or a relationship. All these are more contemporary effects in dancing, and while they may enhance the anonymous vocabulary of today's proficient dancers, they obscure the genius of early inventors like Humphrey.

Only two fully professional, full-time repertory companies participated in the New York celebrations, Repertory Dance Theater and Humphrey's own last company, the Limón. Oddly, the Limón's participation was minimal. During the birthday week, the company mounted a studio showing of three early works and an edited version of *Choreographic Offering*, a tribute to Humphrey made by José Limón in 1964 using her movement themes. The same works, plus a tired-looking *Day on Earth*, appeared on their Joyce season.

Having survived its founder's death for over two decades, the Limón company still seems to be undergoing an identity crisis. New works and revivals are supplied to the repertory by guest artists from the modern dance tradition, but the obvious sources, Limón and Humphrey, don't seem to have a solid hold on the company's aesthetic. There are some good young dancers in the company now; I thought Pamela Jones especially embodied the resolution, the musicality, and the physical intelligence that ought to be Humphrey's legacy to all modern dancers. But the company provides few chances to use these skills in works that demand them. The Limón casting tends to feature senior dancers Nina Watt, Carlos Orta, and company director Carla Maxwell, instead of the hungry younger members who could do justice to a choreographer like Humphrey.

Repertory has never really taken hold in modern dance as it exists in

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ballet. Companies don't have stable enough working situations. They have to struggle for rehearsal space, for income to keep dancers on salary, for the shrinking opportunities to tour. Instead of re-educating the audience with wise revivals, dance companies fill their programs with disposable novelties, even when high quality choreographers aren't around to invent them. What used to be thought of as audience development is now a constant sales campaign. Repertory Dance Theater's *Night Spell*, the most thoroughly successful of the Humphrey centennial performances, proved how repertory can really work.

RDT, which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary with an all-Humphrey program in Salt Lake over Thanksgiving, is perhaps the most solid modern dance archive in the country, doing both historic and contemporary choreography. The company keeps about eight Humphrey works in active repertory, having produced at least fifteen over the years. It has deep roots in the Humphrey tradition through its artistic director Linda C. Smith, who studied with Humphrey protégée Virginia Tanner. In the forties, the gifted Tanner was encouraged by Humphrey to work with children, and became one of the nation's exemplary teachers. She not only founded Children's Dance Theater, which is still alive and healthy in Salt Lake, but was a major force in cultivating an audience for modern dance there. Smith absorbed Humphrey's teaching philosophy through Tanner, and has preserved and enriched the Humphrey aesthetic as both dancer and company director.

Night Spell (1951) comes from the final period of Humphrey's life. The Limón company, her most important affiliation after the war, had not been personally developed under her eye. While Limón himself and other teachers carried on an evolved Humphrey-Weidman style, the new ensemble was noted for its strong theatricality, and Humphrey moved away from the abstract, choral dances of her middle period to make several effective dance-dramas for the company. Reflecting a certain postwar malaise and her own changing circumstances, *Night Spell* is a dark dream piece in which a sleeper (originally Limón) encounters three menacing spirits and captures one of them for his love. The premise is romantic, the mood fragile. The dance could easily look dated, but the longings of our dreams aren't dated. This is the connection that the RDT dancers understand, and that they made tangible in their performance.

As the new puritanism spreads its paranoia on the arts—particularly contemporary arts, performance arts—the idea of preservation has gained prestige in the dance field. While funds for touring, new productions, creative work, and ongoing dance company operations are drying up, new money is now flowing toward recording, videotaping, archiving, databasing, notating, and even reconstruction. The preservation strategy benefits dance history by foregrounding these essential tasks that the other arts have long taken for granted. For Humphrey and other giants of the past to become fully rehabilitated, the dance field will have to make a deeper commitment to preservation and a more thoughtful examination of how it is practiced.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

The Real Thing

"CLAES OLDENBURG: AN ANTHOLOGY," THE WINTER EXHIBITION at the Guggenheim Museum, was surprising in more ways than one. The first surprise was that the museum mounted the retrospective at all. Oldenburg isn't an obvious choice for a full-scale survey; he is a part of the landscape of our time and, as such, rather taken for granted. The second surprise concerned how well the show worked in the confines of Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral which, as I age and experience the odd moment of vertigo, is becoming a less and less agreeable space for viewing art. (Sculpture on a tilt is the last word in annoying.) The third surprise had to do with the unexpected vitality of a Pop Art style that hasn't changed significantly in three decades. By rights, this should have been an excruciatingly repetitive encounter. The Roy Lichtenstein exhibition in the same building two years ago, for instance, struck me as achingly stale—a decent idea and a polished technique run to ground. Yet Oldenburg's wit and restlessness admirably keep him ahead of the embalming process that an "anthology" might suggest.

The focus on mundane, even trashy domestic or commercial realities inaugurated by Pop Art in the 1960s had a tonic effect on the art scene in the twilight years of the New York School, and there is something uniquely clever and comic in Claes Oldenburg's premise that any old object—shuttlecock, saxophone, drainpipe, Good Humor bar, or lipstick tube—can become culturally iconic when blown out of proportion, in all senses of the phrase. With perhaps more exacting attention to formalist concerns than we see in Tom Wesselman or James Rosenquist (and certainly more than in Andy Warhol), Oldenburg proceeded to create sculpture after sculpture that was both elaborately constructed and playful, site-specific or more intimate, always selecting a humdrum theme as his starting-point. By working in squishy materials like vinyl or muslin soaked in plaster, which have a mutable, organic look, he also made an implicit point about the inevitability of change and decay that isn't a feature of mainline Pop. The mass-market "things" that fascinate us, define us, or have consumed us (take your pick) aren't going to last forever, either. We will not endure, but neither will Coca-Cola or Marlboro.

Of more importance than the sociological angle, though, is the realization this show fostered of the growing abstractness of Oldenburg's art, a development that was planted like a seed years ago only to take us unawares late in the day. The artist himself has observed more

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than once that, in our lifetime, the everyday implements he chose to work with would become alien territory, losing their meaning as "content" and gaining it as "form." Indeed, how many adolescents would have a clue as to what the gigantic typewriter eraser is all about? Children of the age of disks and modems have probably never seen a round eraser with a little whiskbroom attachment; few of them have ever used a manual typewriter. So Oldenburg's version of the old-fashioned eraser passes from a whimsical notation about the here-and-now into the realm of sculpture which is primarily about color, balance, energy, and conflicting shapes, not unlike Duchamp's bicycle-wheel-on-a-stool which never had any connection to daily life or "social commentary" to begin with. The same could be said for the swollen clothespin, once an *hommage* to a homely utilitarian piece of wood and metal, and now an obscure totemic form.

The spirit of the top-floor gallery at the Guggenheim, which contained the small-scale models for the huge outdoor sculptures, was one of pure delight. The Des Moines Robinson Crusoe umbrella, the Yale lipstick on caterpillar tracks, the Walker Art Center's "spoonbridge" and cherry, the inverted, levitating shirt collar and tie—all of these works have a technical freshness and a light touch that isn't found in many of the other practitioners of Pop, whose vision of America was often more strident than the reality. A life, and a culture, are made out of all manner of throwaways. "I turn to [common] objects out of my isolation and self-reflection," Oldenburg once noted, "but in objects I discover society, and in objects society discovers itself as well." As it turns out, he knows us pretty well.

A distant cousin of the Pop Art world, the "Beat culture" of the late 1950s and early 1960s is generally taken, with good reason, to be a literary rather than a visual-arts phenomenon. I don't have any strong opinions about its merits as a literary movement—I think I am the last member of my generation never to have cracked the binding of *On the Road*, and I've long since stopped pretending to be interested in William Burroughs' novels—but I can say that in the realm of painting, sculpture, photography, and collage, we confront a lot more bark than bite with these angry young men (now white-haired eminences). Part of the exhibition at the Whitney Museum last winter was composed of vitrines displaying poems and plays by Gregory Corso, Leroi Jones, and Michael McClure, or copies of Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish* and Burroughs' *Junkie*, making "Beat Culture and the New America, 1950-1965" more like a literary-historical show of the sort we would see at the New York Public Library. Likewise, the time-line on the wall, the film clips, the headset recordings, and the photographs of hip parties in the Village provided a feel for an era, but didn't do much (or enough) to suggest what all this has to do with American art. Dada had its poets and rowdy activists, but it also had Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, and Joan Miró.

To be more specific: yes, Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock lived in

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garrets, were indifferent to traditional forms and middle-class Eisenhower-era values, and wanted to take their art in radically new directions, much like Allen Ginsberg and his friends. And Kline's *Dahlia* (1959) and Pollock's *Number 27* (1950) are among the more handsome paintings in the show. But a convincing case wasn't made at the Whitney about the rationale for seeing these men—or Ed Clark or Alfred Leslie or Ronald Bladen—as true "Beats." Not, at any rate, based on what we were able to *look* at. A survey that yokes classic Abstract Expressionists with Larry Rivers and Jim Dine is casting too wide a net to be instructive. Anger, sarcasm, a paradoxical blend of earnestness and flippancy, narrative fragmentation, buddy-ness, hipness, sexual shock, political irreverence—whatever attributes one wants to list for the cultural shift initiated by Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs, Corso, Neal Cassady, Lucian Carr, et al., they have little in common, it seems to me, with the almost romantic or grandiose aesthetic of Kline and Pollock.

The exhibition wasn't entirely devoid of visual pleasures that connect explicitly to "Beat culture." Bruce Conner has the sex-and-death thing down pat, and Jess's collages are sinister and funky. Larry Rivers' 1954 portrait of Frank O'Hara—nude from the shins up, partially erect (I think), hands on head—alludes to the exhibitionism and homoerotic feeling that animated much of this movement. (*Not* that Kerouac, Burroughs, & Co. should be made into heroes of the gay cause. The 1944 murder of a gay man by Lucian Carr—father of Caleb Carr of *The Alienist* fame—and the attendant rallying to Carr's side by his Beat friends, is a repellent episode in this antiestablishment story. See any of the biographies.) Wally Hedrick, though, is my nomination for the one visual artist most in tune with what his cohorts in print were aspiring to. Simultaneously a volcanic eruption, a warhead fired from its silo, and an ejaculating penis, *Big Dick (Nixon) for President* (1960) is raunchy, painterly, energetic, funny, and grim. *Anger or Madame Nhu's Bar-B-Q* (1959) plays on the horny missile motif even more aggressively. From the bottom up, we see a mushroom cloud emerging from a rent Valentine's Day heart; at a second look, we see the same forms as thick red lips parting for an act of oral sex, with the missile as a phallus. On the eve of the Vietnam debacle, this is healthy bad taste, and at least I knew why I was looking at Hedrick's paintings of Nixon and Nhu in this hodgepodge context.

For a head-on confrontation with the subject of what constitutes "the real thing" in art, "Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt" at the Metropolitan Museum was as clear-cut and authentic as "Beat Culture" was muddled. This exhibition contained over fifty paintings and even more prints from the golden age of Dutch art and was installed with a muted sumptuousness that only the Met can bring off. What these disparate works by Rembrandt, Gerard Dou, Govert Flinck, or Carel Frabitius had in common was that they were all at one time or another identified as works by the Big Man himself, and therein lies the problem. For two decades, the famous—or infamous—Rembrandt Project has been going

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through the canon (which numbered 600 Rembrandts at its most uncritical point in the late 1800s) like the Visigoths sacking Rome, de-attributing right and left and leaving many a heartbroken collector or curator in its wake. So now we supposedly have 300 "real" Rembrandts in the world (actually, nowhere near that many, according to the more radical scholars associated with the Project), and this show was designed to let the public in on the nature of the controversy. Taking great care in its wall texts to explain that the issue is not so much forgery as similarity in style among Rembrandt's students and contemporaries, the exhibition called upon every viewer to give some thought to what he or she looks for in an entity we call "a Rembrandt"—and how much that designation should mean to us. The best way to do this, then, was to forsake the acoustiguides and stand at a little distance from each painting, to determine before reading any of the plaques which work we thought was by the master's hand and which wasn't, only then approaching for a closer inspection and the commentary of the embattled experts.

Two thoughts emerged from this unusual endeavor. The first concerns the Met's laudable demythologizing of the process of evaluating and enshrining works of art. If museums are to remain important institutions in a video-dominated, attention-deficit culture, the old-time image of Olympian hauteur has to go. The business of studying, enjoying, and exhibiting paintings needs to be seen as the living, breathing, trial-and-error impassioned venture that it is. When curators share their questions and their doubts with the audience they serve, everyone benefits; knowledge becomes a matter of curiosity and growth, not oracular pronouncement.

The second issue "Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt" raised has to do with cultural trivia, so to speak, vs. artistic essence. In other words, we have long since passed the point where the preoccupation with great names, price tags, and historical context has overshadowed a genuine response to art itself. If Jacobus Levecq did indeed paint *Portrait of a Man with Gloves* as a few revisionists maintain, then the concern for "real" Rembrandts doesn't amount to much, except in a crass commercial sense. The picture remains what it is—a superbly crafted image, a timeless face. Were we to learn tomorrow that Mozart wasn't actually the man behind *Don Giovanni* or that Dickens hadn't in fact written *Bleak House*, no one in his right mind would think less of that opera or novel. Museumgoers, trained to regard the wall plaque as of equivalent significance to the painting in front of them, are desperately in need of a similar liberation. The attribution was never as important, anyway, as an ably rendered glow on a dark fabric, a wrinkled forehead, an unreadable smile, or the varied meanings of a complex composition. This process does some damage to our cozy liberal-arts notions of the uniqueness and originality of genius, but situates us more plausibly in the real world—the only *true* world—of approximations and good-faith struggle.

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T.S. Eliot observed at some point late in his life that the twentieth century was going to be like the seventeenth, in that the most important creative work of the age had been done by the midpoint of the century. Like many of Eliot's statements, this must have rubbed a lot of people the wrong way: how could he know? And wasn't it nice that he lived in those lucky pre-1950 days? (The fact that time is proving him right only makes things worse.) A succession of recent shows focusing on that period—really, more like 1880-1940—had the effect of bringing Eliot's prophecy to mind. Whistler at the Frick Collection, Monet at the Chicago Art Institute, Munch at the National Academy of Design, and Mondrian at the Museum of Modern Art: all of these retrospectives were stunningly entertaining and cumulatively made for a kind of summary-of-Modernism experience, but they were also a reminder of the daunting figures today's artists must struggle against. Moreover, contemporary artists ponder some of the same ideas, but without the same faith in their ability to resolve them.

A great deal of early modern art had to do with the artist's belief that his vision and use of his materials were *equal* in importance to the outer world, or any individual subjects he chose to treat. I often think that Whistler, for all his lapses of craft, isn't given enough credit in this regard; he manifests so nicely the desperate quality of that philosophy. The exhibition at the National Gallery was the occasion for quite a bit of Whistler-bashing in 1995, but a small show at the Frick effectively honed in on this aspect of the creator-*vs.*-subject clash. "The Butterfly and the Bat" documented the relationship between America's most flamboyant dandy-painter ("the butterfly") and France's most imperious aristocrat-aesthete ("the bat"), Count Robert de Montesquiou. The basement rooms of the Frick were packed with exquisite artifacts and emblems of Montesquiou's world and set the stage for one of the most famous portrait-sittings of all time. In the Oval Room upstairs we could linger with the painting itself and judge how successfully—artfully, arrogantly, even viciously—Whistler reached his goal. It is not a strong portrait, but that wasn't the idea. The man who was the model for Proust's outrageous Baron de Charlus has, rather, been reduced to a near-monochromatic color scheme, a wispy, elongated form that *obliterates* his individuality as decisively as Montesquiou obliterated anything he felt unworthy of his patrician gaze. Reinforcing this point, Boldini's portrait of Whistler was hung nearby, allegedly a variation on nineties-style dark portraiture. But it doesn't work: Whistler himself flat-out refuses to be subordinated to the painter's materials; his personality triumphs over any amount of black and murky brown the hapless Boldini cared to employ. Only a master, it seems, can elevate art by reducing life. (In that sense, Boldini's own portrait of Montesquiou at the Musée D'Orsay doesn't even make it out the starting-gate: we think only about the pampered Count when we see it, not Boldini.) This ego-driven avenue of Modernism, learned from the Romantics, wasn't for the faint-of-heart.

Nothing faint-of-heart in the oeuvre of Claude Monet, either, who has

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so often been discussed as a social chronicler (bourgeois life replacing history and myth) or a gifted dabbler in optical experiments. Despite the exhausting size of the show and the oppressive crowds at this blockbuster of the decade, the Monet exhibition at the Chicago Art Institute told a clear story, and it had to do with painterliness and temperament rather than city life or even family picnics by the Seine. The omission of some of the better-known Monets, especially those that most securely peg him as part of a movement, had a bracing effect; the less familiar paintings curator Charles Stuckey selected were about Monet's expressive handling of paint in contexts that appealed to him for their sensuous qualities—the foliage in the Midi, the closed world of his garden at Giverny—that have only a tangential relation to classic 1870s Impressionism. This was, interestingly, a show about Claude Monet as linked more profoundly to Bonnard and Matisse than to Manet and Degas, reinventing rather than chronicling life, feeling his way toward a new grammar for the art form.

A similar venture was the focus of the aptly titled "Landscapes of the Mind" at the National Academy of Design. The pairing of Harald Sohlberg and Edvard Munch did more than introduce New Yorkers to the tenor of advanced Norwegian art circa 1900. Like Monet and Munch, Sohlberg uses nature as a metaphor for internal states, but his art falls into that no-man's-land between an idiosyncratic Naturalism and a true expression of the interior life; the landscapes are flat both pictorially and spiritually, and so (inadvertently) they highlight Munch's more probing achievement. Sohlberg was drawn to weighty, portentous blues and meaningful shadows, but never once approached the dynamic effect of Munch's *Night in St. Cloud*, where the colors and brushwork exclusively—without help from drawing—invite us to join in the sadness of the image, a lone figure by a window watching a boat pass by. All of life and nature is "real" in Edvard Munch only insofar as it is known through the filter of an anxious mind, an unfastidious hand, and what he liked to call the "inner eye." What makes Munch deeper than, say, Whistler is that his inwardness is born of grief and fear rather than self-love and temper.

The needs of the "inner eye" could be said to have driven Piet Mondrian as well, but with the Dutch Theosophist-abstractionist the journey went beyond erotic auras and silent screams. MoMA's 1995 exhibition was the definitive Mondrian show and, when taken in tandem with the recent Kandinsky exhibition there, one of the best illustrations of what abstract art is about at its most serious. Mondrian's passion for blocks of primary colors and thick intersecting black lines has acquired for Neo-Plasticism a rather forbidding reputation, and I have always suspected most art lovers never really bought into it: geometry for its own sake will never be a popular notion. Who, in his heart of hearts, is all that keen on purity and severity anyway? But the beauty of an exhibition that delineates Mondrian's evolution from a timid Impressionist to a sort-of-Fauve to a student of Cubism is necessarily going to

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produce a different, richer image of his intentions, and this is what happened when MoMA was transformed into the Gemeentemuseum. We found ourselves in the presence of a man completely smitten with the properties of paint and, most importantly, fascinated by the power of uncluttered, even jarring arrangements of color long before the more elemental compositions of the 1930s or *Broadway Boogie Woogie*—not a puritanical temperament at all, ever. Moreover, this painter came to believe in the spiritual, transcendent capabilities of his quest for a rhapsodic interior reality. The jettisoning of exterior visual "facts" in the interest of evoking "the universe that reveals itself in contemplation" (the artist's words) took on the air in this exhibition of a thoughtful, loving process rather than a brutal housecleaning. Of course, new problems emerge if we accept Mondrian on his own terms: how many Theosophists are there among us today? How many people can make it through Mondrian's own writings about what abstract art meant to him? The same applies to Kandinsky. We want a free ride from these men, a reduction to a formalism that doesn't quite make it. But, then, twentieth-century atheists do the same in the great Gothic cathedrals, admiring the architecture and only nodding in the direction of what these edifices really meant to those who built them. At least now, finally, we know to think of Mondrian as an impassioned pilgrim (and a penetrating, loving observer of his Zeeland sand dunes and water mills), not the killjoy of modern art caught in a labyrinth of his own making.

At the galleries: to be sexist and irrational for a moment, I sometimes think there is a kind of wit and elegance to be found among women artists in this country that is quite beyond their male counterparts. I pondered this prejudice of mine during numerous, not to say obsessive, visits to the Florine Stettheimer show at the Whitney last fall. What man in the history of American painting ever approached her blend of humor, craft (almost but not quite campy), and tart affection? The show of Peggy Bacon's graphic art at the Kraushaar Galleries and the new sculptural works by Catherine Lee at the Galerie Lelong got me going on that theme again. Bacon used her considerable representational talents to depict the world she knew—art-school classes, writers and men-about-town, New York between the wars—all the while deflating pretensions and prodding egos. But, oh, so gently and so comically, with a devastating "Who, me?" kind of innocence: you don't even have to be a critic of the O'Keeffe cult to take pleasure in Bacon's drawing of the grande dame of Abiquiu as a bird of prey, eyebrow arched and nose pointed (sniffing out the competition). Varying degrees of love and satire are directed, by way of pencil or etcher's needle, toward Sinclair Lewis, Dawn Powell, O.O. McIntyre, Heywood Broun, or George Bellows, who has never looked more like the Ohio ballplayer he was—and never looked balder. Male vanity hadn't a chance with Peggy Bacon.

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Perhaps most wicked of all is the suit-and-tie image of Salvador Dali, Surrealism's *enfant terrible* redone as a good bourgeois with a bad haircut.

Catherine Lee is also a master of the light touch, and I think of her when I think of Stettheimer and Bacon precisely because she is doing so much and making it look so effortless and natural. No bombast, no brooding ego on display. For years, this artist has been inching her way from the realm of "constructed painting" toward sculpture; in her autumn show at the Galerie Lelong on West 57th Street, she was seen to be working more firmly than ever in the spirit of the latter. These abstract, shaped relief works differ in size, height, and color, with many of the smaller ones arranged in rows as part of a series. Essentially fragments of bronze, glass, or ceramic whose surfaces have been formed by raku glazes and tiny inset metals, each has a texture of its own despite their apparent similarity from a distance. Starkly elegant as they were against the white gallery wall, there is also a clever, even puckish quality to Lee's mute objects as they play with our sense of their real heaviness and ostensible delicacy, their actual variety and seeming uniformity.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Freudian Drama

FREUD HAS HAD ENORMOUS INFLUENCE *on* modern drama, but is rarely found *in* it. Terry Johnson's recent play, *Hysteria*, a weird juxtaposition of tragedy and farce, depicts Freud's morphine-induced hallucinations as he is dying of cancer. Set in 1939 in London, where Freud had fled after the Austrian *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany, it is inspired by two little-known facts: Soon after arriving in London, Freud saw a Ben Travers farce at the Whitehall Theatre; a few months later, he received a visit from the famous surrealist painter Salvador Dali. *Hysteria* also draws on recent, feminist critiques of Freud's abandonment, in 1897, of his previous childhood "seduction" theory (*molestation* would be a better word) of the cause of hysteria, an emotional disorder that can cause paralysis, aphasia, or simulation of physical diseases.

In the beginning, the play seems realistic. Freud, dozing in his study late at night, is interrupted by a woman tapping at the door to his garden. He eventually lets her in. Dripping wet from the rain, she demands that he psychoanalyze her on the spot, despite the late hour and the fact that he, painfully dying, no longer takes patients. Only after she threatens to run naked and screaming into the London night does he agree to a brief consultation.

The woman, named Jessica, gets on the couch to recount symptoms of hysteria that Freud soon recognizes as identical to those of the case history of "Rebecca S."[1] he published thirty years earlier. Denouncing Jessica as a fraud, he gets her to agree to leave, but in fact she hides in the closet while he is briefly out of the room.

The next day, Freud's doctor arrives. They quarrel over Freud's final, controversial work, *Moses and Monotheism*, which argues, among other things, that Moses was not a Jew but an Egyptian, and that his Jewish followers murdered him. Since war with the Nazis has just begun, it is hardly an auspicious time for Freud, a Jew, to be publishing a book that could be considered anti-Semitic.

Thus far, *Hysteria* seems like a somber problem play, an examination of some of the contradictions in Freud's life and work. But when Freud realizes that Jessica is in his closet, we are off and running in Ben Travers country, with cover-ups, double-entendres, sight gags, suggested female nudity, and slamming doors. The farcical tone and action are aggravated by the arrival of the zany Salvador Dali, who ends up running about with

[1] Similar to Freud's "Dora," but apparently the playwright's invention.

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his trousers around his ankles. The two meanings of *hysteria*—both a serious nervous disorder and a fit of laughter—are juxtaposed.

The play lurches between buffoonery and seriousness. Jessica confronts Freud over his abandonment of the seduction theory. Rebecca S., Jessica's mother, had been orally raped by her father, but Freud had convinced her that the rape was her own fantasy, with the result that she eventually committed suicide. There is even a suggestion that Freud abandoned the seduction theory because he himself had been molested by his own father. This grim possibility sets off a surrealistic coda, in which the room turns into a Salvador Dali painting, with a melting clock, rubbery walls, and a telephone that turns into a lobster. Freud dies with a bang.

An epilogue jumps back in time to show Freud receiving a large injection of morphine. "You may hallucinate," warns his doctor. As Freud dozes off, there is a tapping at the garden door, and we realize that the whole play has been his dream.

It is hard to know what to make of all this; it was hard even to summarize such a bizarre play, which also manages to slip in Dali's theories of art, and to reveal Freud's elderly sisters stark naked. The critique of Freud's rejection of the seduction theory seems justifiable, though rather technical, resulting more in docudrama than in drama. Freud rejected his previous theory, he said, because hysteria was simply too common to have such a cause, which would have implied childhood sexual abuse on a massive scale; instead, he posited a theory of childhood sexuality in which hysterical symptoms were the result of fantasized sexual acts with a parent. The child herself now became the would-be seducer. The criticism today of Freud's reversal is that sexual abuse is far more widespread than was traditionally believed, and that Freud's new theory amounted to blaming the victims for it. Jessica suggests that Freud conveniently changed his mind because "your patients were the daughters and wives of wealthy and privileged men. Whom you began to accuse of molesting their own children." Fair enough, but it also must have taken courage to drop a theory that had brought Freud considerable attention. Furthermore, the idea that the women had been secretly lusting after their fathers can hardly have been any more acceptable to the genteel classes than the seduction theory. As for Freud having been molested by his own father, the only evidence for that is a double negative: Freud pointed out that he himself had exhibited hysterical symptoms, but had *not* been seduced by his father; Jessica sees this argument *not* as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the seduction theory, but as an evasion of a painful truth. In the absence of supporting evidence, however, her case is weak logically, and a tacked-on *deus ex machina* dramatically.

The play succeeds not because of the fashionable trashing of Freud's theories, and certainly not because of the clinical psychoanalytic debate, but because of the vigorous characterization of Freud, who remains dignified and articulate throughout the play, with a tart wit often based

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on Freud's actual words. (Asked to go to an air raid shelter, he replies, "I shall soon be spending a substantial amount of time in a hole in the ground. I don't intend to climb into one while I can still argue the point.") This Freud is not a simple villain, but an Aristotelian tragic hero, a man of high abilities acting in error, which causes suffering.

I saw the play last July in Los Angeles at the Mark Taper Forum, then again in London in December. Both productions were flamboyantly directed by the brilliant young English director Phyllida Lloyd, but with different casts and settings. The former production was better; the lavish surrealistic effects (designed in both productions by Mark Thompson) worked more effectively on the big open stage at the Taper than on the small, cramped proscenium stage at London's Duke of York's Theatre. The two Freuds, the American David Margulies and the English Henry Goodman, were equally good, but the American supporting cast was superior to the English: Richard Libertini was livelier and looked more striking as Dali than Tim Potter in London, while Anna Gunn was better spoken as Jessica than Phoebe Nicholls, who had a shrill, tight voice, along with a slight lisp.

Nevertheless, I liked the play better the second time I saw it. In L.A. the drastic shifts in tone did not seem grotesque or disruptive, but merely awkward; the second time around, knowing that *Hysteria* was a dream play made the shifts seem to work. Then I bought the script, to discover that it actually has the play *begin* with Freud getting the shot of morphine; director Lloyd ought to restore this if she stages the New York production, which should arrive next season.

Terry Johnson had another work on London's West End playing simultaneously with *Hysteria*, entitled *Dead Funny*. Set on the day that British comic Benny Hill died, it features a man whose obsession with comics like Hill nearly wrecks his marriage; he is more interested in sex jokes than sex itself. Comedy, usually associated with the erotic, becomes the opposite, a sterile force epitomized by the strange, androgynous figure of Hill himself, who, despite the endless buxom women and bawdy jokes on his television program, lived alone and was asexual. Johnson is clearly a writer to keep an eye on; he is the most original, though hardly the most skillful, of emerging British playwrights.

Another play about a real-life psychoanalyst opened in late fall, Nicholas Wright's *Mrs. Klein*, off-Broadway in New York at the Lucille Lortell Theatre, starring the superb Uta Hagen in the title role. Set in London in 1934, the play concerns Melanie Klein, one of Freud's disciples.

Some of the theories and practices of the early psychoanalysts now look dubious. If Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory is questionable, even more so is the fact that he psychoanalyzed his own daughter, Anna. Similarly, Melanie Klein psychoanalyzed her son and daughter—her very first patients. The core of *Mrs. Klein* is a confrontation between Klein and her daughter Melitta, a psychoanalyst herself who is now in her thirties. It seems that Hans, Klein's son and Melitta's

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brother, recently died in suspicious circumstances, falling or jumping to his death during a trip to the mountains.

Melitta, or course, feels that the death was a suicide, blaming her mother. "We never felt you loved us," she charges. "You were interested in us." It is an intriguing premise, badly developed. The play is very talky; the characters drink sherry and talk, drink whiskey and talk, drink tea and talk, drink white wine and talk. More exposition comes out—Klein squelched a homosexual affair between young Hans and another boy; she ridiculed his violin playing as "suppressed masturbation." Narrative about the past is only interesting onstage when it has some impact on the present, but Melitta's challenge never seriously upsets her mother.

In the end, evidence comes out—again presented through exposition—that Hans's death was definitely an accident. He had fallen in love with an older woman with a husband and children; while having a tryst with her in the mountains, he went for a walk, during which the ground gave way. Now, at last, Klein collapses and weeps, because she realizes that her son died without ever telling her of his paramour; the fact that he kept a major part of his life a secret from his mother is as much a rejection as a suicide would have been. "He never mentioned her," she cries. "Not once, not once." The play ends with her agreeing to re-analyze Melitta(!), although as the initial session begins, it becomes clear that this will be more of a mutual analysis than a simple clinical examination.

Wright's dramaturgy is far less imaginative than Terry Johnson's; *Mrs. Klein* is the kind of play *Hysteria* would have become—solemn, clinical, trite—without Johnson's zany supporting characters and surrealistic interpolations. Wright does add a third character, a female German refugee whom Klein has recently hired as an amanuensis, but she is nothing but a foil; it would have been simpler (and cheaper, in production) for Wright to have had Klein and then Melitta talk to people on the telephone, rather than to someone onstage with no dramatic purpose except to listen.

The production, directed by William Carden, was as heavy as the script. Laila Robins seemed cold and lifeless as Melitta, while Amy Wright brought nothing of interest to the underwritten role of Klein's secretary. Both had trouble with their German accents, with the umlauted vowels of occasional German words completely beyond their linguistic abilities. Only Uta Hagen, a native speaker of German who ordinarily speaks perfect, unaccented English, got the dialect right. But then, why should three native-born German characters, with no one else around, speak to one another only in heavily accented English? Or, if the convention is that they *are* speaking German, as it would be with a German play translated into English, then why use the accents at all?

Despite the maladroit script and production, Uta Hagen's performance was a joy. She even managed to deliver the lengthy exposition, which includes a lot of psychoanalytic jargon, with vividness and

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conviction. Her voice was not only properly accented, but resonant, well-modulated, and emotionally convincing; even though I found the final revelation about Hans's death an inept piece of writing, she managed to have me weeping along with her. Hagen is one of America's finest actors, who has unfortunately devoted most of the last three decades to teaching rather than to acting. I am less impressed by her teaching, and her two famous textbooks of acting, than I have long been with her abilities on stage; my memory of her Martha in the original production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* made the subsequent film performance by Elizabeth Taylor look pathetic.

For a social problem play to succeed, it needs to have a problem that engages us. My feeling about women becoming Catholic priests is the same as it is about gays in the military: Yes, you should be allowed to serve, but why would you want to? (As an atheist and one-time draft-dodger, however, perhaps I am not the best judge.) Maybe Catholics or feminists will be caught up in Diane Shaffer's new play, *Sacrilege*, about a feisty nun who finds her priestly vocation squelched by the Church's male hierarchy, but I was not. Shaffer's writing shows promise, but her secondary characters were more interesting than the sketchy heroine with the Great Big Dilemma.

Sister Grace runs a New York Crisis Center that, we are told, is very successful. She is energetic and fearless. When two drug dealers rob her of her purse in the park, where she is doing early morning tai chi exercises, she nonchalantly tells them to take it as a gift. In an interview in *The Village Voice*, she denounces the leaders of the Church for preventing women from becoming priests, denying her what she feels is a vocation. This naturally leads to a confrontation with her superiors, where she vigorously defends her views: God transcends gender, Christ embodied feminine virtues of meekness and compassion, women served as priests in the early Church. The men respond feebly—Shaffer writes with such outrage that she cannot imagine anyone having a serious opposing view, which is essential for genuine drama.

A subplot has Sister Grace take up with Ramon, one of her muggers. A lapsed Catholic, he has agonized over the Church for years. With her guidance, he not only returns to it, but actually goes on to become a priest.

At the end of Act I, in response to Ramon's desperate pleas, Sister Grace administers last rites to his dying friend, which only a priest may perform. This leads to her being disciplined in Act II, and eventually being expelled from her order. I found her "problem" tepid. For one thing, she seems as a nun running a mission to be able to do the most important thing that a priest does—help people. Are priestly ceremonies all that important, especially for a nun who is unconventional to begin with? For another, her conflict, unlike Ramon's, is both one-sided and entirely external; she never feels the slightest misgiving. This makes Ramon the more interesting character; in performance, he was also

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better acted, by Giancarlo Esposito, than was Sister Grace, by Ellen Burstyn. Although Burstyn has won a Tony, was President of Actors' Equity, and also served as Artistic Director of the Actors Studio, she is primarily a film actress. Her voice thins out, becoming harsh in emotional moments, while her emotional reactions are too small, too purely facial, for a large theatre like the Belasco, a lovely old Broadway house with good acoustics, which nonetheless requires acting on a large scale. Esposito's strong features and fine voice, plus his emotional depth and variety, easily filled the theatre, while Burstyn seemed to be waiting for the camera to come in for a close-up.

Don Scardino directed *Sacrilege*, with big, flashy settings by John Arnone, which only aggravated Burstyn's problems. If the play had been done unpretentiously off-Broadway, it might have succeeded, especially with some script revisions. But Arnone's monolithic white walls with their horde of candles and big red floating crucifix dwarfed the modest social problem of the play, and the equally modest talents of the lead actress.

Through most of the nineteenth century, before railroads made it possible to tour entire productions, theatrical stars would tour alone, plugging themselves into local repertory companies all across the country. Patrick Stewart, playing Prospero in *The Tempest* in a New York Shakespeare Festival production, seemed to revert to that practice. In this case, the local company was pretty good—far better than the collection of no-talents the NYSF has favored in recent years—but none of them could measure up to the splendid British star.

In fact, Stewart not only overshadowed his supporting cast, he surpassed all the other Prosperos I had seen, including Paul Scofield, Alan Mandell, Michael Hordern, and John Wood. Stewart, an Associate Artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company since 1967, has the technical skills typical of the best English actors. With that resonant, slightly nasal voice so well-known to "Star Trek" lovers, he bites into the poetic lines, shaping their rhythms and cadences so that the meanings are clear, while the emotional values are precise, intense, and varied. He also moves beautifully; the masque, for example, was staged to end in a dance, in which Prospero joined. Even though Stewart was competing with professional dancers, he kept the focus, swaying with ease and grace, not to mention a great sense of fun. It was his masque, his dance, his play.

But it was in conception that Stewart truly outclassed all rivals. Most actors play Prospero as simply a wise, sad old man who never changes; there is no drama in the characterization, only lyricism. Stewart, however, recognized that *The Tempest* is actually a revenge play. Prospero is an older Hamlet, a scholar caught up in politics against his will, but where Hamlet avoids vengeance until circumstances force it upon him, Prospero thirsts for revenge until, at the triumphal moment when he at last has his enemies in his power, he renounces it. "The rarer action is

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in virtue than in vengeance," he declares. For most Prosperos, this is a foregone conclusion, but for Stewart, it was an agonizing choice, as was his decision to give up his magical powers. This was a vigorous Prospero, relatively youthful (the decision to dance was part of this concept), mercurial in his emotions, but a character who grows and learns. There was also a sexual *frisson* between him and his daughter Miranda; not that he went around panting and groping, but that his giving up of Miranda to young Ferdinand was another kind of renunciation, the relinquishing of a lovely young woman who was not only his daughter but his sole human companion of many years.

The rest of the cast generally looked better than they sounded. All were at least audible, but their speeches rarely came to life; where Stewart was precise and varied, they tended to be wishy-washy and monotonous. Thus Carrie Preston as Miranda was lovely, delicate, and innocent, but forced the character's emotions with a shrill voice. Teagle F. Bougere, a tall, striking black man with a shaved head, wearing only Elizabethan "pumpkin" hose, spoke Caliban's lines clearly but vaguely, reciting the lovely "sounds and sweet airs" speech as though he did not know what he was saying. Aunjanue Ellis, a black woman playing Ariel, had similar problems; nevertheless, it was interesting to see the character, often played *by* a woman, this time played straight out *as* one.

George C. Wolfe, Artistic Director of the New York Shakespeare Festival, directed with his usual ineptitude. The blocking was busy and meaningless, while the pacing was slow, with many self-indulgent pauses. With a white Prospero, and a black Caliban and Ariel, you may have guessed that this was a "concept" production focussing on race relations. In fact, that aspect of the play was stressed only at the end. The initial use of Brazilian and Caribbean motifs—stilt dancers, calypso music, West Indian costuming on many "natives"—served throughout mainly to give an exotic quality to Prospero's island that seemed valid. Caliban was played for sympathy, but without turning Prospero into a Simon Legree.

In the final moment of the play, however, after Prospero has renounced vengeance and abjured his "rough magic," Caliban ran up with a club ready to brain him. Prospero, apparently on a humility jag, bowed his head to receive the blow, whereupon Caliban dropped the club and ran off to join Ariel, presumably to live happily ever after! This ending was so fatuous, so out of keeping not only with the text but with the production thus far, that it was embarrassing. It could not, however, take away the memory of Patrick Stewart's masterful performance.

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BERT CARDULLO

Bread and Poetry

for Kirsi

Il Postino (The Postman) is the last film I would have expected the Englishman Michael Radford to make, until I remembered that, in addition to the work for which he is best known, the luridly lifeless *White Mischief* (1988), he has directed two movies of some merit that are tangentially related in theme to his latest feature. The first is *Another Time, Another Place* (1983), about the cultural and emotional differences between a community of Scotsmen and a trio of Italian P.O.W.'s trapped together during World War II; the second, *1984* (1984!), from Orwell's prophetic novel about the dangers of political tyranny, among them the degree to which totalitarian governments must corrupt language in order to maintain their rule. Based on the Chilean novel *Ardiente Paciencia* (*Burning Patience*), by Antonio Skármeta—published *after* Skármeta made his own film of the same material, with the same Spanish title, in 1983—*Il Postino* tells the story of the friendship between Pablo Neruda and a postman who gradually awakens to the former's poetry before his politics.

The book was adapted for the screen by Anna Pavignano but set in Italy, not Chile, for Michael Radford took on this project at the request of his friend Massimo Troisi, the Neapolitan actor and director, who wished to play the postman. Such an adaptation was serendipitously made possible by Radford and Pavignano's discovery that in the early 1950s Neruda, a Communist senator whose political party was outlawed in Chile, had to go into exile in order to avoid arrest—an exile that included several months' stay in 1952 on the island of Capri. He wound up there at the invitation of the eminent historian Edwin Cerio, who offered him a secured villa in indignation at the Italian government's treatment of its distinguished guest. Although this fact is not mentioned in *Il Postino*, and perhaps should have been, Neruda was politically unwelcome in Italy and hounded by the police. Also not mentioned is that the Capri of Neruda's *Memoirs* (1974)—the "popular Capri of . . . humble people, hard-working and natural"—has become Salina, one of the Aeolian islands off the northeast coast of Sicily, for the obvious reason that the people's Capri of the Chilean poet's memory has today become the sun-filled, picture-postcard isle of every tourist's dreams.

Il Postino opens with a telling image: a pair of hands opening a piece of mail. Those hands belong to Mario Ruoppolo, who, unlike nearly

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everyone else on this island of fishermen and fishwives—or rather the portion of it known as Cala di Sotto—is functionally literate yet has never held a job. Then Pablo Neruda arrives and the job of delivering his mail, and only his mail (as none of the illiterates receive any!), opens up at the local post office. Since Mario has the required bicycle, and since his father has become impatient with his idleness, he applies for and gets the temporary, low-paying position, which he much prefers to the fishing-cum-boating life. Each day this simple, unassuming man, loaded down with "tons of mail" for the world-famous poet, must ride his bicycle up a steep hill to Neruda's villa, and each day he diligently, even zealously, carries out his task. Gradually a friendship grows between these two most unlikely of friends; gradually, too, Mario's interest in poetry grows as he reads Neruda's books and haltingly discusses the subject of similes and metaphors with his literary master. To the postmaster, the Communist Giorgio, Mario calls Neruda "the poet of love," but Giorgio disagrees, insisting that the Chilean writer and political leader is "the poet of the people." He is, of course, both, and Mario will learn from him in ascending order the lessons of Marxism, love, and poetry, each of which will figure—sometimes in isolation, sometimes in combination—in the actions the postman takes, or the events that overtake him, in the course of the film.

Mario Ruoppolo soon wishes to write poetry as well as read it and tells Neruda of his desire, to which the elder poet responds that in order to do so he must first open himself up to nature (one of the recurring themes in Neruda's own poetry). Accordingly, the postman seeks out, and communes with, the beautiful natural surroundings of Salina—the sea, the shore, and the rocks, all saturated by the sun and all underscored by either long takes with characters or "dead time" without them. The sea and shore in particular are photographed in such a way by Franco di Giacomo that their respective bluish and sepia tones suffuse the whole of the image in a Romantically transcendent mixture. But opening himself up to nature for Mario also includes opening himself up to other human beings, for up to now he has lived a reclusive life with his reticent, widowed father. One of those human beings, of course, is his mentor, Pablo Neruda; the other becomes Beatrice Russo, a fiery beauty who works at the local café that Mario has long frequented, yet whom he discovers only upon being touched by the genius of Neruda.

The Chilean writer himself draws the parallel between the postman, a budding poet who falls in love with a woman named Beatrice, and Dante Alighieri, who immortalized the Beatrice he loved in his *Divine Comedy*. Naturally Mario has never heard of Dante, nor has he heard of Virgil, whom Neruda doesn't mention but whose role in Dante's life he plays in the postman's. Just as Virgil, through his *Eclogues* and *Aeneid*, guided Dante to the integration of philosophical learning, history, and personal experience in his own art—in return for which Dante chose the Roman poet to guide him through Hell and Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*—Pablo Neruda, through his person as well as his poetry, leads Mario

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Ruoppolo on his way to an aesthetic, sensual, and political awakening. Lest we shrink from such a comparative analogy for its mixing of poetry and politics where Virgil and Dante are concerned, let us recall that Virgil's pastoral poetry had among other goals the political one of repopulating rural Italy and rehabilitating an agricultural economy decimated by civil wars prior to the reign of Augustus; and that, as one of six priors of Florence in 1300, Dante allied himself with the "White" people's party, which favored independence for the city from papal control and government that represented the interests of the commercial and industrial classes in addition to those of the old aristocracy. Let's also remember that, for most of its 113 minutes, *Il Postino* is a secular comedy which undercuts its equating of Mario Ruoppolo with Dante Alighieri ("Alighieri," repeats the postman to Neruda, "is that spelled with an H?"), even as it employs such an equation as one way of returning the art of poetry to the voice of the people.

Most of the movie's comedy, however, derives from Mario's courtship of Beatrice and Neruda's reluctant efforts to help him win over his love. For instance, after the postman meets Beatrice over a prosaic game of table-soccer, at which she beats him badly, he asks Neruda to write a poem for or about her. When the Chilean writer complains that he cannot do so without knowing the object of his inspiration, Mario earnestly offers him the ball from the game, which the slithering Beatrice had placed between her teeth in mockery-cum-enticement of her conquest. But the ball fails to inspire Neruda—indeed, it, or rather Mario's innocent impertinence, upsets him—so the postman does the next best thing from his point of view: he copies a poem from one of Neruda's books and gives it to the impressed Beatrice as if it were his own creation. Unfortunately, however, Beatrice's widowed Aunt Rosa, her legal guardian as well as the owner of the café where she works, finds the poem folded up in her niece's bra and is shocked by its lyrics, each sentence of which begins with the word "naked." The aunt storms up to "Don Pablo's" villa in protest, since she knows him to be Mario's friend and tutor. Rosa takes issue less with the poem's "obscenity" than with its clear indication, to her, that the postman and her niece have already consummated their relationship. For the untutored Rosa takes the "naked-you-are" metaphor literally, believing that Mario is referring to Beatrice's nakedness in bed while making love; and when Neruda attempts to explain the meaning of metaphor, she repeats the word as if it itself were salacious!

Language to Aunt Rosa is language in action—a far less philistine sentiment than one might think. Language to Pablo Neruda, at least in this instance, is proprietary, and he chastises Mario for plagiarizing his work. To which the postman responds with democratic conviction: "Poetry belongs to those who use it, not those who write it!" And he uses it, not to seduce Beatrice, but to win her hand in marriage. In this he is different from the postman of Skármeta's novel, who, as he prepared to fornicate with his girl for the first time, "discovered that the erection he

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had sustained so faithfully for months was but an insignificant hillock compared to the mountain range now emerging from his groin." This quotation captures the tone of the couple's novelistic courtship but not of their cinematic one, which is almost completely innocent. There are no sex scenes shown in the movie, either before or after the marriage of Mario Ruoppolo and Beatrice Russo (over Rosa's objections to the postman's lack of capital)—and well there could have been in this era of sexual candor. To be sure, these two also marry in the book, but their marriage there lacks the spiritual element that it has in the film; and this spiritual element is consistent with the film's—and for that matter the novel's—likening of Mario to Dante. For in the poetry of Dante physical love was transformed into an earthly image of heavenly love; true love still struck through the eye but reached to the soul and created a hunger for spiritual rather than fleshly beauty. The sight of Dante's Beatrice, in other words, drove out all foul thoughts, her presence ennobled, and her discourse was an aid to salvation. In *Il Postino* we get some of the spiritualization of man's attitude toward women that was so prominent in the poetry of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, which is to say that the movie's romantic comedy also has something of the divine about it.

The marriage of Mario and Beatrice in the local Catholic church is witnessed by Pablo Neruda, despite the priest's objection to a witness "who doesn't believe in God and writes filthy Commie poetry." Yet Neruda is praying at the back of the church as the priest makes this statement, and we have no reason to believe that the poet dissembles. Thus does *Il Postino* complicate its view not only of religion but also of politics, for the joining of Communism to Catholicism appears to be an uneasy alliance, just as does the joining of Communism and poetry. Indeed, Mario Ruoppolo's own attempts to emulate the Communist fervor as well as poetic devotion of his mentor seem strangely half-hearted when they are not downright comic. He does decide to vote for the Communist candidate over the corrupt Di Cosimo in Cala di Sotto's mayoral election. But immediately upon making his decision he intervenes "communistically" on behalf of a fisherman trying to get the best price for his catch from one of Di Cosimo's henchmen, with the result that the poor fisher loses the sale altogether! And after the Communists lose the election, the postman waxes not revolutionarily indignant but philosophically indifferent. When he muses, "After we break our chains [and elect a Communist government], then what do we do?" he recalls the existentialist-Absurd reaction of such playwrights as Beckett and Ionesco to the politically programmatic theater of Brecht—an artistic response to social(ist) realism that was occurring at the very time in which *Il Postino* is set, the early 1950s.

Neruda's Chile, of course, did "break its chains" in 1970 when Salvador Allende became the country's president, the first Marxist to be elected chief-of-state of a South American nation. But his policies were resisted from the start by many factions within Chilean society, and a

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worsening economy led to a series of violent strikes and demonstrations that culminated in 1973 with the military overthrow of Allende's government by General Augusto Pinochet. Skármeta's *Burning Patience*, unlike Radford's *Il Postino*, is set during this turbulent period and ends—somewhat heavyhandedly—with the assassination of Allende, the death of Neruda (also in 1973), and the detainment of the innocent mailman for "questioning" by the authorities. From 1970 to 1972, Neruda had served as his country's ambassador to France, and in the novel it is this service that interrupts his relationship with the postman in the Pacific fishing village of Isla Negra (where the poet kept a home). In the film, their friendship is interrupted by the (factual) revoking in August 1952 of the order for Neruda's arrest, more than three years after its issuance, which prompts his return to Chile.

Notification of the revocation comes at Mario and Beatrice's wedding celebration, where Neruda and his own (third) wife-to-be, Matilde Urrutia—who had accompanied him to Capri/Salina—join in the festivities. Neruda's departure means, of course, that the postman no longer has a job; and with his sole postal customer gone, Mario's only alternative is to work in the kitchen of Aunt Rosa's tavern. This is work that he despises, in part because he regards his wife's aunt as a slave-driving money-grubber, in part because this purported Communist seems interested only in labor of the artistic kind. Before leaving, his Chilean mentor had exhorted Mario to document, then write about, all the sounds of his island: the wind, the waves, the birds on the beach, the bells in the church. With the help of Neruda's own tape recorder, he industriously does so, in the end constructing a kind of tone poem that he then translates into words, "Song for Pablo Neruda." But because of his job and family responsibilities, Mario doesn't begin this work until a year after Neruda's departure, and what finally motivates him to make the time for it is the arrival of his first letter from the poet, dated 15 October 1953, combined with the celebration of All Souls' Day on November 2nd, the feast on which Roman Catholics pray for the resurrection of those suffering in Purgatory. The letter is something of a disappointment, since it's a purely formal request from Neruda's secretary that the poet's former postman mail back to him the various possessions he left behind on the island in his haste to return to his beloved Chile. Unlike his wife and her aunt, however, Mario takes this disappointment well, humbly arguing that he is a "nothing" who hasn't earned a personal greeting from so distinguished a writer as Pablo Neruda, and that in order to do so he must fulfill the poetic mission that the Chilean set for him.

Immediately thereafter, we see Mario alone on the shore, watching a rowboat containing a statue of the Virgin Mary bobbing up and down out in the Tyrrhenian Sea, even as, prior to the opening of Neruda's letter, we had seen a procession in honor of the Virgin Mary winding its way through the streets of Cala di Sotto. The association of Mary with All Souls' Day is not accidental, for, as someone conceived without original sin, the virgin mother of Christ is believed to be especially efficacious at

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petitioning God on behalf of supplicants and sinners—especially those sinners consigned to Purgatory but awaiting elevation to Paradise. And the juxtaposition, or connection, between images of Mary and the renewal of Mario's poetic invention is itself not accidental, for two reasons. First, the postman's artistic model, Dante, devotes the twenty-third canto of the *Paradiso* of his *Divine Comedy* to Mary, whom we, and he, have been prepared to encounter by the appearance of Beatrice in canto XXX of the *Purgatorio*. It was largely through Dante's efforts that the cult of the Virgin spread during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; thanks to him, she became the great object of veneration and joy for Catholic Europe, the Queen to whom all of Paradise is subjected and devoted. Second, Dante's poem dramatizes how humility is the ground of the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the basis for one's modest acceptance of whatever grace one may receive; Mary was known to be the woman most deserving of the exalted grace of bearing the incarnate Christ on account of her humility; and Mario himself is humility incarnate in his devotion to the poetry as well as the person of Pablo Neruda, going so far as to name his first child after the Chilean master despite the fact that he never receives a personal letter from the poet.

Mario never gets to see his son, however, for Pablito is born after the postman is accidentally trampled to death when the crowd at a Communist rally turns to rioting. Mario is at the rally to read his poem "Song for Pablo Neruda," which has won a contest sponsored by a literary magazine with Marxist sympathies. The poem is ostensibly chosen because of *its* Marxist sympathies, since it treats a distinguished member of the international brotherhood of Communists, but it is really an ode, even a kind of love song, to Neruda. This may explain why the throng of workers gets restless, then excited, as Mario begins to recite his work; it is when the police move in to control the crowd that the riot starts and the postman gets knocked off the speaker's platform, only to be crushed beneath the feet of his comrades. We learn of his death when Pablo Neruda returns to Salina a few years later to see Mario and is told by Beatrice what happened. In the novel, it's the postman who learns of Neruda's death at a clinic in Santiago, shortly after the overthrow of Allende's Popular Unity government by the military coup d'état of Pinochet, and shortly before his own arrest; he learns as well of the (factual) ransacking and vandalizing of the famous poet's houses in Santiago and Valparaíso, Chile. The implication, of course, is that the shock of the coup killed the sixty-nine-year-old Neruda. (In truth Neruda died of cancer, which he had contracted in 1970.) The implication is also that the military junta gave license to the looters of the late Neruda's homes, seen by the junta as repositories of Communist credibility and memory.

The film more or less reverses this ending: Neruda learns of the stampede on the part of Communist supporters that inadvertently resulted in Mario's death, then plays back in his mind—in black and white on screen—the events leading up to his friend's demise, especially

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Mario's assiduous making of the "tone poem" dedicated to the Chilean writer. At the end of the flashback, we get first a high overhead shot of Neruda, in color, alone on the beach of Cala di Sotto; next an extreme long shot of the beach with the poet barely visible on it; and last an image of rocky heights and the rolling sea, the final shot of *Il Postino.* Pablo Neruda is still alive at the close of the movie, then, although he has been diminished in size by the camera only to be replaced on screen by nature. The implication here—far richer than the novel's—is not simply that poetry and politics don't mix, for in the exceptional case of Neruda they did mix or at least peacefully lived side by side. The implication is also, and more importantly, that poetry is the more permanent or eternal of the two; that it is a linguistic act of love toward the world and its people and thus a kind of politics unto itself; that the rhythms and graces of a poem offer spiritual connectedness to the universe in a way comparable to religion but never politics.

This is not to say that Mario Ruoppolo disbelieved in the Communist ideal; it is to say that the poetic ideal, especially the poetry of love, was more empowering to him for its infinite joining of language to imagery, feeling to idea, intimacy or interiority to revelation, and, in his case, folk to history. He learned both poetry and politics from Pablo Neruda, and the latter seems to be left at the end with the recognition that politics in a sense killed his friend but poetry has given him life, not only through Mario's poems themselves but also through his son, Pablito, the fruit of the postman's poetic courtship of Beatrice. It was Neruda himself, after all, who had urged Mario to commune with nature, not the communal polity, if he wished to become a poet. And it is Neruda who is left in the film to ponder the role of poetry and politics in his own life, although there is no evidence that the poet ever did this in reality. In fact, he seems to have had an experience the opposite of Mario's at the Communist rally, the opposite of the kind that would cause one to question one's socialist aesthetic, as the following passage from his *Memoirs* makes clear:

> It has been the privilege of our time—with its wars, revolutions, and tremendous social upheavals—to cultivate more ground for poetry than anyone had ever imagined. The common man has had to confront it . . . in solitude or with an enormous mass of people at public rallies.
>
> When I wrote my first lonely books, it never entered my mind that, with the passing years, I would find myself in squares, streets, factories, lecture halls, theaters, and gardens, reading my poems. I have gone into practically every corner of Chile, scattering my poetry like seed among the people of my country.

The film reverses not only the novel in the end, then, but also the apparent real-life experience of Pablo Neruda. It further symbolically reverses literary history, for in Neruda's outliving of Mario, it could be

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said that Virgil survives Dante—to be touched by, and perhaps to learn from, the man whom he himself had once tutored and touched. What might this Virgil have learned from the death of this Dante? That his Virgilian faith in poetry as an oral-aural, public-cum-ameliorative art form is increasingly anachronistic in a modern world devoted to the written word read in private, if read at all, to the spoken word only as it can be carved up into clever sound bites, and to life lived in solitary rather than in common. Conversely, this Virgil might have learned that in a modern world more and more segmented into isolated groups of people each with its own specialized knowledge and concerns—a fragmentation that surely began with the rise of secular humanism in the post-Dantean Renaissance—the easiest person to reach through oracular poetry is the simplest, least knowledgeable, most "public" one, as well as the one least preoccupied by work. That person would be Mario Ruoppolo, and, unfortunately for the art of poetry, the Mario Ruoppolos of the world are an all but vanished breed.

As played by Massimo Troisi, Mario Ruoppolo is himself a poetic revelation, a man whose very soul makes itself felt in his pedestrian luminosity of face, theatrical delicacy of movement, and ingenuous surety of speech and gesture. Unbeknownst to many Americans, Troisi was one of the leading Italian film artists of his generation along with Nanni Moretti, Maurizio Nichetti, and Roberto Benigni—all of them *auteurist* comedians of one kind or another. *Il Postino* was his twelfth film since 1981, when he made his debut with *Ricomincio da Tre* (*I'm Starting from Three*). Unlike the Tuscan Benigni, whose physical buffoonery in something like *Johnny Stecchino* (1992) makes up much of the movie's humor, the Neapolitan Troisi relied for his comedy upon the shrugging, pouting, or doubting pathos—the spiritual buffoonery, if you will—of an innocent adrift in a sea of baffling (post)modernity.

I use the past tense in reference to Massimo Troisi because in June 1994, a day after completing work on *Il Postino,* he died at the age of forty-one from congenital heart disease. The film is understandably dedicated to Massimo Troisi for his herculean effort, not simply to finish the film that he told Michael Radford was his life, but also to raise the lowly Mario in our minds to the level of Parnassus. He is joined there by Philippe Noiret in the role of Pablo Neruda. Noiret played a similar, wonderfully complementary role in *Cinema Paradiso* (1988)—a film that, in its conjoining of cinema, religion, and communality, is closer to the poetry of *Il Postino* than it initially appears to be. Here his work is slightly more difficult, both because he's playing a celebrity and playing opposite a character who's a childlike adult, as opposed to an adult-like child (the more common occurrence). Noiret triumphs, however, through studied understatement that he makes look unstudied, and his triumph is matched by Luis Enrique Bacalov's musical score, which could easily have been by turns miserably maudlin and unctuously uplifting but settles instead on a delicate balance of the sprightly and the supernal, the wishful and the woebegone—like *Il Postino* itself.

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KAREN WILKIN

Doing More Work than Most Ten Men

DO WE REALLY NEED A 681-PAGE BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM MORRIS (not counting an introduction, illustrations, a lengthy list of sources and notes, acknowledgements, and an index), even one that draws on newly available material, unconstrained by the sensibilities of living relatives? The answer is yes, if it is Fiona MacCarthy's new study of this nineteenth-century dynamo—and no.[1] Yes, because Morris was himself larger than life. (I'll get to the no later.) He was not only a man of prodigious accomplishment, but a paragon of unstoppable energy and dazzling versatility, even by Victorian standards. Since Morris' multivalent career has been dissected in a series of studies by specialists, much of what MacCarthy recounts is not altogether new, but this does not diminish the value of her ambitious volume. She is the first of Morris' biographers to have access to the complete publication of his letters, and she has used this wealth of material, along with what seems to be everything else even remotely connected with her subject, to attempt to unravel the connections between his life and work in a coherent overview. It's a daunting task, given MacCarthy's chameleon subject, a man almost impossible to categorize, whose outstanding characteristic seems to have been his eagerness to plunge headlong into the complexities of a staggeringly diverse series of enterprises and to master them all. As MacCarthy tells us, when Morris lay dying at sixty-two, his illness was diagnosed by one of his physicians as "simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men."

There is Morris the craftsman, the inspired decorative artist. Profoundly influenced by John Ruskin's critical writings, Morris was a driving force in the movement to recreate, in nineteenth-century terms, the idealized, utopian fusion of high aesthetic standards and honest labor that Ruskin believed was responsible for the excellence of the best medieval art and architecture. Morris designed furniture, stained glass, wallpaper, textiles, rugs, and tapestries, revamped the technology of dyeing, revived such arcane skills as gilding, calligraphy, and illumination, designed type and bookbindings, and created thoughtfully orchestrated interiors that brought the products of all of these efforts into harmony. His forms have been described as being like those of the early

[1] WILLIAM MORRIS: A Life for Our Time, by *Fiona MacCarthy*. Alfred A. Knopf. $45.00.

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Gothic, when everything suggested vigorous springtime growth, both literally and metaphorically, as architectural members and manuscript borders alike became sinuous vines laden with fresh young leaves and swelling buds. Many of Morris' elegant curvilinear fabric designs are still with us—think of Liberty of London's signature printed wool challis and cotton lawn—and while his lush patterns of twining honeysuckle and overblown poppies, top-heavy lilies and heraldic birds, like his palette of resonant, jewel-like colors, are intensely evocative of both their period and the ideals that provoked them, they continue to fascinate and delight the eye.

To a large extent, Morris' decorative art furnishes the setting when we imagine England in the late nineteenth century or at least, the enlightened, liberated fraction of late nineteenth-century England—let's say the circle of Whistler and Wilde at the peak of their success. (Never mind the open warfare between Ruskin and Whistler.) Morris' airy interiors, with their fluid patterns and spare, geometric furniture, are tangible symbols of a rebellious taste, informed equally, it seems, by the Gothic and the Japanese, wholly antithetical to the standards of the rising middle class, that provided a welcome alternative to the overwrought, over-upholstered style beloved of "correct" Victorian society.

If this had been Morris' sole contribution, the story of his life and work would probably still reward our attention, but the sophisticated artisan was also a fecund poet, occasional novelist, even more occasional travel writer, and fearless translator. The numerous works published in his lifetime include contributions to an anthology of *Arts and Crafts Essays*; a series of lectures gathered under the title *Hopes and Fears for Art*; verse translations of Vergil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Odyssey*; a collection of translations of *Old French Romances*, comprising such medieval classics as "King Floris and the Fair Jehane" and "Of the Friendship of Amis and Amile"; plus English prose versions of such robust Northern tales as *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* and *Grettis Saga, The Story of Grettir the Strong*, these last, admittedly, with a Scandinavian collaborator. The Morris shelf also includes *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism*, *The Manifesto of the Socialist League*, and the *Manifesto of English Socialists*, (with H. M. Hyndman and George Bernard Shaw). Morris, the designer cum artisan cum former of taste cum writer who valued so highly the achievements of the past, was also a fervent social reformer and political activist. (There's even evidence that he was ahead of his time in being concerned about the environment, but that's another matter.)

Born in 1834, the eldest surviving son of a newly prosperous broker-investor, a pillar of British upper-middle-class rectitude, Morris received the privileged upbringing and education befitting the heir to a substantial new fortune. He was sent to Marlborough, a relatively new and notably brutal public school, and then entered Oxford, where he was to prepare to take holy orders. Morris wasn't a particularly ambitious student. As was possible at the time, he decided not to aim at an Oxford

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degree, but simply enrolled to read for a "pass"—the Victorian equivalent of a "gentleman's C."

But this apparently typical young bourgeois was, in fact, anything but. The portrait that emerges from the descriptions by his friends and contemporaries, in MacCarthy's book, is of a genuinely peculiar individual. He is reported to have been, as a young man, very handsome, exuberant, and intelligent, but given to uncontrollable fits of rage, episodes of trance-like states, and eccentric, tic-like behavior. He is described as awkward, greedy, and strangely unresponsive, with "inward looking" eyes. The cause seems to have been a form of epilepsy which recurred with differing degrees of severity in Morris' family, most tragically in one of his beloved daughters. One commentator has suggested that it may have been a form of Tourette's Syndrome, a diagnosis that also seems to account for Morris' maniacal creative energy. What truly set Morris apart, however, was not his intermittent physical oddity, but his distinctly un-bourgeois taste for art and literature.

MacCarthy points out that, remarkably enough, Morris emerged from his conventional schooling with his interest in the arts intact. Remarkably, too, the friends that he made while he was at Oxford shared his aesthetic leanings and may have been significant in determining the direction—or more properly, the directions—Morris eventually followed. Early on, much to the consternation of his widowed mother, he wreaked havoc with the expectations of his family by abandoning his theological studies to enter the studio of an architect who admired medieval buildings as much as he did. (Aesthetic values seem largely to have replaced religion in Morris' life once he decided that he would not enter the church; his religious faith appears to have waned as his enthusiasm for architecture grew.) Then, after several years of pupillage with G. E. Street, later acknowledged as a kind of grandfather to a generation of Arts and Crafts architects, Morris abandoned a career in architecture to study painting.

These shifts were not simply youthful caprices, but signals of both a lifelong refusal to follow the prescribed path for a rich, upper-middle-class Englishman of his generation and a lifelong readiness to immerse himself totally in the pursuit of new ideas. At fifty, Morris defied his class and background once again, to "cross a river of fire," as he put it, and embrace the most radical brand of socialism of the period. (For "socialist" in the 1880s, read "pure Marxist.") Typically, Morris was not content simply to support the reform movement, but became a wholly engaged activist, a founder of the revolutionary, anti-status quo Socialist League. Morris' politics were so extreme that his views have been described as indistinguishable from those of the Anarchists, although he resigned from the Socialist League when it began to advocate violence as a way of effecting change. MacCarthy points out that although Morris' obituaries minimized this aspect of his career, he was, as with his other undertakings, both deeply committed to social and political reform and

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deeply involved with the movement in many ways; his daughter, May, in fact, married a "comrade." There's nothing unique about Morris' double allegiance to the arts and to radical politics. The American Cubist Stuart Davis played an important part in progressive social action in the 1930s, while in Morris' own lifetime, Courbet exemplifies the engagé artist, a serious painter who defied the art establishment in both his work and behavior, and a member of the short-lived Commune of 1871. Morris' "conversion" to the views of the radical Left seems to have been, typically, both wholehearted and abrupt, but in a sense, his entire adult life was a celebration of the socialist ideals of honest labor and productive work—of effort that culminated in a tangible result, as opposed to the capital-producing paper-shuffling of his father and his father's colleagues. These beliefs are manifest in Morris' matter-of-fact approach to design, his direct engagement with process, and his obvious belief that the character of the artifact was a reflection of the history of its making.

The one thing the protean Morris does not seem to have been is the kind of indefatigable traveler that Victorian England produced in surprising numbers—those intrepid adventurers, both male and female, who trekked through fever-ridden swamps and rode camels across vast deserts. Which is not to say that Morris remained docilely at home. As a very young man, he and a group of Oxford friends made an exhaustive study of the cathedrals of France, and somewhat later, when he was thirty-seven, he made a pilgrimage to Iceland, to visit the sites of the sagas that had so completely captured his imagination. (He is reported to have bored and exasperated his friends with his enthusiasm for Norse legends and the Northern past.) Characteristically, he kept acutely observed journals of these trips.

The unifying thread, through all of these seemingly disparate, even contradictory activities, is Morris' intense practicality. For all of his idealism, he was no abstract theorist, but a hands-on pragmatist with a sound business sense. His decorating and manufacturing business was run to make a profit and was extremely successful; his central London shop was well-known and conspicuous. Coupled with this practicality was a strain of what probably should be termed modernism, although it's risky to speak of modernism in reference to Morris, since in many respects he appears to have been wholly in tune with the taste of his times; fresh and forward-looking as much of his work can look today, he seems to have been unaware of or oblivious to the truly adventurous painting of his day, and the artists he associated with were unregeneratately retrograde in their desire to recapitulate the spirit and forms of the early Renaissance.

What *can* be called modernist is Morris' rejection of what he saw as the debased aesthetic values of Victorian England in favor of what he believed to be the superior values of the past. What makes this modernist is Morris' desire to attain that high aesthetic level in his own efforts not by recreating literally the things he liked best, but by making

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new things with similar characteristics: witness his light-filled, pared-down interiors with glowing fabrics, rhythmic wallpapers, and wooden furniture that (daringly) revealed the logic of its construction, all designed to harmonize and complement one another. Such rooms depend on elements and attitudes that Morris enjoyed in Gothic art, but no one could possibly mistake them for period reconstructions. In both architecture and artifacts, Morris enjoyed evidence of the passage of time in the form of visible traces of long use. He admired, as well, traditional craftsmanship and time-honored design, but his admiration was based on real understanding of the value of earlier efforts, not simply on nostalgia for a sentimentalized past.

Morris' history, as recounted by MacCarthy, bears witness to his boundless curiosity about the new as well as the old, his willingness to experiment and to explore new possibilities. For all his enthusiasm for the medieval and his esteem for the hand-crafted, he was no enemy of technology. Morris objected to modern methods when the results were shoddy or meretricious; he disliked, for example, the machine-carved, mass-produced furniture that increasingly replaced handmade items in his lifetime. But when modern methods produced a result whose quality satisfied his high standards, he was happy to take advantage of them. Some of the fabrics and wallpapers he designed could be made only with intensive hand labor and complex processes, but others were intended for mass production, using simple, ordinary methods such as block printing. Sometimes, special techniques had to be devised or revived by Morris himself in order to achieve what he wanted, but only when such methods were the only alternatives. He detested, for example, the harsh brilliance of the aniline dyes that were the pride of the nineteenth-century textile industry, so with his usual enthusiasm and thoroughness, he set about teaching himself everything he could about dyeing methods, past and present. From 1875 to 1878, he spent extended periods of time in an important center of silk production, the small industrial town of Leek, in Staffordshire. He lodged with the owner of one of the town's leading dye works, a forward-looking polymath, sympathetic to Morris' wish to experiment, who was willing to have his plant serve as a combination of graduate school and laboratory. But at the same time that Morris was exploring ancient materials and techniques in his quest for reverberant color, literally up to his elbows in traditional vegetable and insect dyes (his friends and family complained about his perpetually dark blue hands), he was also arranging to have carpets machine-woven to his specifications by the same mills that were muffling Victorian middle-class homes in yards of Axminster and Wilton broadloom.

The sheer magnitude of Morris' achievements might justify the thickness of MacCarthy's volume, but her thesis is that the roots of these achievements and the explanation for his vast, wide-ranging appetites are to be found in the details of his personal life. Unlike Morris' previous commentators, she tries to give us all of them. The first "official" biography of Morris, published shortly after his death, was

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written under the watchful eye of his widow by someone whose closeness to the family made objectivity impossible. Not surprisingly, family scandals, illnesses deemed shameful at the time, resentments, infidelities, and the like were not discussed. MacCarthy has no such inhibitions. What makes the story she tells interesting, however, are not revelations about the less savory aspects of Morris' life, but rather the cast of characters. Morris' intimates were members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of painters, the group of idealistic young artists, championed by Ruskin, who strove to create a new English art with the qualities of the quattrocento painting they admired. Some of Morris' ties to the group went back to his Oxford days. His long, close friendship with Edward Burne-Jones, for example, dated from when they were both would-be priests who converted from the Church of England to the Church of Art; after coming down from Oxford, the two young men shared living quarters and studied painting. MacCarthy suggests that Burne-Jones's working-class origins, which were so different from Morris' affluent background, were significant to the designer's later "conversion" to socialism. Another member of the group, the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, became a kind of fixture of Morris' married household, although this was a far less straightforward connection than the relaxed camaraderie Morris had enjoyed with Burne-Jones since they were university students. What attracted Rossetti was not just his colleague's company, but his exotically beautiful wife. Jane Burden was a working-class "stunner," in the vernacular of the day, whom Morris married when he was twenty-five—yet another example of his defiance of what was expected of a young man of his class and wealth.

Janey Morris would figure significantly in any discussion of the Pre-Raphaelites. Her sulky, sharply defined features, powerful jaw, and pouting lips made her a paradigm of the kind of beauty these artists most admired and she appears in numerous paintings, drawings, and photographs, her slender neck bowed, like that of Swann's Odette, under the weight of her masses of crisply curling dark hair. (This distinguishes her from the Pre-Raphaelites' other favorite models who were very much of the same type, but mostly redheads.) We recognize Janey's strong, sensual face and languid posture in portraits by Burne-Jones, in Morris' sole extant—not very wonderful—easel painting, *La Belle Iseult*, and in eight or so works by Rossetti, where she appears variously as Proserpine, Guinevere, and, improbably enough, the Virgin Mary—improbable because when Morris' stunner was not posing for Rossetti and his colleagues she was a dedicated hypochondriac who spent much of her time reclining on a sofa, required regular trips to Bad Ems to take the waters, and was persistently unfaithful to her husband.

Was there a note of malice or perversity in Rossetti's painting his mistress as the Virgin? MacCarthy offers quotations from Rossetti's mocking letters that make it plain he could be devastatingly cruel about Morris' odd appearance and awkward actions. She believes, moreover, that the designer was only too aware of his wife's behavior and that the

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unhappiness it caused him was partly what drove him to work at so many different things with such extraordinary energy and dedication.

Morris' life was obviously an unusual one that warrants and rewards study. His work was significant, original, and influential. MacCarthy's biography is scrupulously researched, thoroughly documented, and given the scope of its ambitions, well organized. The author raises engaging, pertinent questions about motivation and result, and strives to answer them by bringing to bear as much incontrovertible evidence as is available. She is plainly fascinated by her subject and has clearly made an enormous effort to achieve the impossible—to see with his eyes, enter into his skin. She has apparently read and looked at everything extant that is remotely relevant; whenever she was allowed to, she tells us, she handled and "stroked" things that Morris made, in an effort to experience what he experienced. It's all ambitious and admirable. So why do I have reservations about the book?

Partly because, for all of her heroic efforts to impose a logical, chronological structure on her overwhelmingly complex material, MacCarthy has consistently erred on the side of excess. "When in doubt, leave it in," seems to be her motto, and the book sinks under the weight of the information she accumulated in the course of her research. (The relentless, jackhammer rhythm of choppy declarative sentences necessitated by the sheer quantity of facts she feels compelled to impart doesn't help either.) I am certain that MacCarthy benefitted from her total immersion in Morrisania, that everything that she encountered and assimilated sharpened her perceptions and informed her interpretations of Morris' life and work. But she could have been far more judicious about what she chose to include. It's enough for the reader to know, for example, that Morris and his wife went frequently to Bad Ems without being treated to a detailed description of the spa's various baths and treatments, how they worked, and what they were supposed to cure. If MacCarthy—or her editor—had pruned some of this overgrowth, her penetrating study would have been far more shapely and less cumbersome.

Morris' history is absorbing, but in the end, his work proves to be more interesting than his life. It is, of course, only a footnote to the great upheaval of thinking about art that took place in his lifetime, something that becomes painfully clear when we realize who his contemporaries were; Morris was two years younger than Manet, the same age as Degas, and five years older than Cézanne. But while Morris' achievement seems modest in relation to that of these giants, his work seems significant indeed when it is compared to the efforts of his friends and colleagues in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The meticulous, sleek, strangely rigid paintings of Burne-Jones, Rossetti and their circle were controversial when they were first exhibited in England, but they were soon accepted and admired, not only, I believe, because of Ruskin's vigorous support, but because they upheld traditional formal values indistinguishable from those of the most entrenched Academician. By contrast

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to both the Pre-Raphaelites' pictures and Victorian norms, Morris' designs seem noticeably innovative and daring. Certainly, his work has dated less than the self-conscious, mannered paintings of—say—Rossetti. Given the complicated history of the two men, there's a pleasing irony in the fact that Morris' "minor art"—decorative art—which we might expect to reflect ephemeral concerns of fashion and trend, should prove more enduring and engaging than the supposedly timeless "high art" of Rossetti. MacCarthy's exhaustive new biography makes us savor this triumph on Morris' behalf.

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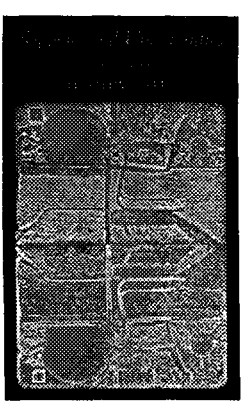

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Fiction Chronicle

THE BIG NOVEL OF LAST SUMMER was Richard Ford's latest, a sequel to his much admired *The Sportswriter* of ten years back.[1] *Independence Day* came out at the right time: Fourth of July weekend was coming up, and the novel's protagonist, Frank Bascombe, spends part of that weekend in 1991 trying to sell some real estate (he's now in the realty business in Haddam, N.J.). He also spends a few hours with his sweetheart—before heading off on a hapless-hopeless mission to pick up his troubled fifteen-year-old son, Paul, and visit the basketball and baseball halls of fame in Springfield, Mass. and Cooperstown, N.Y. *Independence Day* is, at 451 pages, a longer book than *The Sportswriter* and there's really no reason why Ford couldn't have gone on and on, since abandoning yourself to the first person singular makes for fluidity, on occasion for "terrible fluidity" according to Henry James. That is, if on page seventeen you're asked to devote this much attention to your neighbor across the street, Skip McPherson, the book will stretch out:

> He is returning from his summer hockey league in East Brunswick (ice time available only before daylight). Many mornings I've seen him and his bachelor CPA chums lounging on his front steps, drinking a quiet beer, still in their pads and jerseys, their skates and sticks piled on the sidewalk. Skip's team has adopted the ruddy Indian-warrior insignia and hard-check skating style of the '70 Chicago Blackhawks (Skip hails from Aurora), and Skip himself has taken the number 21 in honor of his hero, Stan Mikita.

Do we want to hear this much about someone who plays no significant role in the novel ("Skip hails from Aurora")? Only if we're readers already seduced by Ford's agreeably intimate voice into the expectation it will provide news about American life today. Most of the time that voice doesn't disappoint, as in this typical bit of on-the-roadism from Frank's drive up through southern New Jersey to Connecticut. He's on NJ 35, the beach highway:

> through Bay Head and West Mantoloking, patriotic pennants and American flags are snapping along the curbside, and down the short

[1] INDEPENDENCE DAY, by *Richard Ford*. Alfred A. Knopf. $24.00.

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> streets past the seawall I can see sails tilting and springing at close quarters on a hazy blue-steel sea. Though there's no actual feel of shimmery patriot fervor, just the everyday summer wrangle of loud Harleys, mopeds, topless Jeeps with jutting surfboards, squeezed in too close to Lincoln and Prowlers with stickers saying TRY BURNING THIS ONE! Here the baked sidewalks are cluttered with itchy, skinny bikini'd teens waiting on line for saltwater taffy and snow cones, while out on the beach the wooden lifeguard stands are occupied by brawny hunks and hunkettes, their arms folded, staring thoughtlessly at the waves.

In the continuous present of this book, it's not surprising that Ford's favorite word to begin a sentence with is "Plus," since there's always something further to be said. At more reflective moments, we hear in his narrator the Southern voices, polite, troubled, humorous, of Walker Percy and Peter Taylor, good voices to have behind you. And the real estate parts of this book, in which Frank attempts to sell some to an unhappy pair of campers from Vermont, are marvels of informed comic realism. Although the larger moral outlines or implications of *Independence Day* were, for me, blurred and unresolved, that didn't matter much, so long as I stayed satisfiedly immersed in the particulars. The book does go on too long, but why complain about a writer who is so interesting most of the time?

An unaccountably unreviewed novel of a few months back, neglected most noticeably and curiously by the *New York Times Book Review*, is Alan Lelchuk's sixth, a quite new departure for this never less than engaging writer.[2] Mr. Lelchuk first hit the scene in 1973 in a burst of publicity for *American Mischief* (Norman Mailer threatened to sue, since a character in the book by that name was shot in a vital bodily orifice), then followed it up with *Shrinking* and two novels about a woman named Miriam, in which there was lots of sex, lots of argument, lots of American mischief. With *Brooklyn Boy* (1989), Lelchuk took a retrospective, autobiographical turn in a novel that contained excellent writing about baseball, and boxing. Now, with *Playing the Game*, he has produced not only the best novel about basketball I've encountered, but a vigorous, well-salted meditation on class, race, and college sports in nineties America. *Playing the Game* is about a seemingly washed-up basketball coach in his fifties, Syd Berger, who, for practical-cynical reasons, is hired to coach basketball at Conway College (read Dartmouth). By some astute recruiting, handholding, and savvy coaching skills—plus a boost from Lelchuk's tall tale—Coach Berger takes Conway all the way to the final four in NCAA's March madness. At which point they get derailed, but by then we have been treated to an excellent account of how the game is played, and

[2] PLAYING THE GAME, by *Alan Lelchuk*. Baskerville Publishers. $23.00.

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what the stakes and secrets are of college recruiting—its effect on human values, on "education."

What is involved in being that much-admired, much-despised figure, an American college coach? Lelchuk spells it out this way at the book's opening:

> The boys are his flock, his crew, pure and complex. Coach needs first to find them, banged up in the ghetto ditches and alleyways or lying bruised in the working class gutters and ravines, then pick them up and guide them into the modern houses of worship—our high school and college gymnasiums—and there nurse and nurture them, until graduation if possible, and after that too, if necessary. The boys are his flock, no matter what they do or how they sin, how little they know or what they desire. For it falls on Coach to educate them when the professors scorn or overlook them, guide them when the Deans and Counselors write them off, raise them up when the fans and media use and abuse them.

Among other things Coach Berger institutes, as half-time pep talks, a course in America as seen through some of its great nineteenth-century voices—Emerson, Parkman, W. E. Du Bois, Melville. Sure enough, the boys take to it, even seem athletically empowered by it. In thematic organization, the novel is a fable or romance (in that old American nineteenth-century tradition), but gritty and finely-observed in its realistic detail. Maybe you have to care something about basketball really to care about the novel—how can I tell, having lost myself to the sport decades ago? But Lelchuk's tone throughout is reader-friendly; that is, he imagines someone who might be listening to the coach's first person narrative. And the American voices heard are also worth listening to, beginning with the epigraphs where Walt Whitman (in a fine paragraph from *Democratic Vistas*) and William James rub shoulders with Isaiah Thomas and Bill Parcells. An intelligent young person who likes to read is one ideal audience for this novel; but as an older bloke who doesn't play basketball anymore, I found it refreshing, funny, and smart.

If Alan Lelchuk has been momentarily overlooked, the fate of George V. Higgins, who has now published twenty or so novels, is to be caviare to reviewers who want something else.[3] In Henry Holt Mr. Higgins has a devoted publisher, and over the past ten years he has brought out eight novels that are never less than fully planned and executed, like *Impostors*, *Outlaws*, *Trust*, and *Victories*. I presume these books sell pretty well, since many of them are available in mass market paperbacks. But reviewers condescend to Higgins as if he had gotten onto a formula for producing fiction (to some extent true, yes), bureaucratized his imagination and just keeps turning out novels. A character in a Robert Frost

[3] SWAN BOATS AT FOUR, by *George V. Higgins*. Henry Holt and Co. $23.00.

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dialogue says scornfully to her husband, "You—oh, you think the talk is all." In Higgins' novels the talk is pretty much all, never more so than in this one where a put-upon banker, David Carroll, and his wife Fran decide to make a transatlantic crossing on a luxury ocean liner. There they fall prey to a couple of sharpers; one of them, an old lover of the husband named Melissa, has engineered the whole invitation; the other, her partner Burton Rutledge, an elderly, seemingly distinguished Boston type, is the Carrolls' table mate. Melissa seduces David, David's wife cottons on to it, looks to Rutledge for a shoulder to lean on—eventually, out of sympathy and to spite her husband, writes him a very large check.

Telling the plot of a Higgins novel is a mug's game, no fun at all to play. The fun exists wholly in the reading—or listening, rather; in this book the listening is mainly to Rutledge at table, as he spins out endless, appealing, cleverly persuasive accounts of his life, even more so the life of his friends. These accounts provide nothing for the critic to take away and make meaningful since everything is implicit and there are no ideas on the table; it's all in one ear and out the other. Listening to Rutledge (or Higgins) in *Swan Boats at Four*, is like eating the meals that accompany his narrative—this modest repast for example:

> They had a four-course lunch beginning with beluga caviar, continuing with asparagus with hollandaise sauce and lobster Newburg over wild rice, concluding with a compote of fresh berries with Cointreau, all of it washed down first with the rest of the champagne, raised in toasts as the hawsers were cast off, and then by a bottle and a half of a fine Chassagne Montrachet.

Meanwhile Rutledge is telling them about his friend Eldred Motley, a rich man who never held a job and graciously declined more than one invitation to serve in salaried positions:

> Not that any sort of misguided altruism to the best of my knowledge was ever involved in this. None of the ostentatious "I've-got-plenty-of-money-and-I'm-not-going-to-take-a-job-away-from-somebody-who-really-needs-one" pompous claptrap, that you get from lazy rich kids so shallow and lazy that no one's hired them to mow lawns, if they were destitute, starving, in rags, because they'd surely cut their feet off in the blades. No, nothing like that at all. . . .

On goes the paragraph, and the next one, and the next one. Higgins' talkers remind one of Faulkner's, propelled by one conceit into another so that—by way of "explaining" Eldred Motley's motives in declining salaried positions—we're suddenly hearing about not just lazy rich kids, but ones so out of it they can't be trusted to mow lawns (even if starving, in rags) since they'd cut their feet off in the blades. It takes patience and attention to keep on following a narrative whose rewards involve nothing more or less than navigating the sentences themselves, their

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twists and turns, their cumulative building of a supple voice. Reading Mr. Higgins is like nothing so much as reading Ivy Compton-Burnett: all his novels blur into one another, and you might as well reread one since you won't remember how it went the first time. Also, like Ivy Compton-Burnett, he is a coterie writer, to be valued greatly by members such as myself.

Rand Richards Cooper's second collection of stories—his first, *The Last to Go*, centered on the ups and downs of a suburban family—continues and extends his ability to write fiction that is realistic but not minimal; humorous and elegantly crafted, yet also sad.[4] The men these stories are about are self-critical, sometimes to the point of self-disgust; usually well-off, they are middle class males about to go off to college, or married with children, or separated, or retired beyond the battle. They share usually a delight in masculine prowess and performance that over the narrative's course receives severe modification (in one way or another, they all get their comeuppance), and their stories involve the correction or refinement of the male ego. Cooper's tales stand squarely in the tradition inaugurated by Joyce's *Dubliners* and developed most notably in the shorter fiction of John Updike.

Sometimes by the story's end the correction has only begun, as in a lovely one about a boy's revelatory experience at summer camp (Mr. Cooper's settings are often recognizable, old-fashioned, and what's wrong with that?), after which the youth, preparing to enter sixth grade, redefines his relation to his parents: "The key will be to take charge and make them listen. They'll have to realize that what he has lived the past two weeks is not something cute or childish or temporary—but, on the contrary, something that's going to come back with him and form the core of his life from now on." So Andy Hatter plans to shake hands with his father instead of hugging him; to greet his sister, an old antagonist, with cool politeness; to offer his mother merely his cheek to be kissed. In "The Hoax," a cruelly tricked young man in his twenties decides to change his life, convincing himself that it "was about to begin, and it seemed like a good idea to be paying attention when it happened." No doubt, but how does one do that? The gestures that end these stories are far from the last word on anything. In "The Way Things Always Happen," Reardon, a confident lawyer, determines to teach his bleeding-heart son a lesson about how you don't give away good money to a dubious Haitian fellow with a hard-luck pitch. The father ends up both right, and alienated from son and wife:

> Reardon, you idiot, you fool! He took a long look around at his property, half hoping the house itself might offer a rebuttal, or perhaps the wrought-iron lawn furniture he'd bought, or the mul-

[4] BIG AS LIFE: Stories About Men, by *Rand Richards Cooper*. The Dial Press. $21.95.

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> berry trees he's had planted. But these serene objects kept their silence; nothing spoke on his behalf.

The figures these stories enact are never less than strongly designed and carefully traced; in perhaps the most elaborate and moving of them, "Soldier of the King," a daughter looking over her father's words about the death of a male college classmate who adored him, constructs (in italics) an imagined scenario that involves her father in feelings and embarrassments she's never thought he could experience. Seldom has the rhetoric of all-boys-together, of college daze, been more subtly conceived. One rather grudging review of Cooper's collection spoke as if it were too late in the game, given our advanced degree of gender enlightenment, to write stories about men many of whose dilemmas and situations we've seen before. But with a style as fresh, intelligent, and vividly particular as Rand Cooper's, those situations can be made newly interesting, as they are in *Big as Life.*

No surprise that Edmund White also writes stories about men, nor that they're almost all gay men.[5] The eight stories in his new collection are typically on the longish side and their virtues are similar to ones seen in Mr. White's essays: lively observation of gay social and cultural phenomena; excellent evocation of American "period" domesticity, as in this bit from the 1950s about mother and son in "Reprise":

> "Men don't swoon over men, dear," Mother reminded me, peering at me over the tops of her glasses. Now that I unscramble the signals she was emitting, I see how contradictory they were. She said she admired the sensitivity of a great dancer such as Nijinsky, and she'd even given me his biography to make sure I knew the exact perverse composition of that sensitivity. "What a tragic life. Of course he ended up psychotic with paranoid delusion, martyr complex, and degenerative ataxia." She assured me, with snapping eyes and carnivorous smile, that she liked men to be men and a boy to be all boy (as who does not), although the hearty heartlessness of making such a declaration to her willowy cake-baking, harp-playing son thoroughly eluded her.

Mr. White is all humorous surface (as in that nicely parenthetical "as who does not"). Although he pays special attention to male beauties like "Ray" (in "An Oracle") he manages to keep his head. "His full lips seemed to be traced in light where a slightly raised welt outlined them, his deepest blue eyes contained an implosion of gold particles falling into the black holes of his pupils, his jaw had comic-book strength and his teeth were so long and white they looked dangerous." We go on to view "brown-gold hair on his chest spreading wings over his lungs like that goddess who spreads her arms to protect the pharaoh from all

[5] SKINNED ALIVE, by *Edmund White.* Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

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harm." There's almost always a saving touch of mischief and conscious extravagance about such descriptions.

But I think the virtues of these stories are historical and cultural-sexual rather than literary. They don't go more than skin deep, and feel autobiographical to the point where one wishes for a bit more free-wheeling imagination; more debilitatingly, they go on and on for a while and then end, seldom with any interestingly marked out dramatic turns. They lack denouement and are severely limited in the subjects taken on. After you go through them, picking out bits of interesting information and amusing exchanges, you've more or less got it—no need to reread. Even in the best of them, like "Reprise," the mode feels a little too unvaryingly declarative:

> It was true he'd become a miser. He bought his acrylic shirts and socks in packs of ten. His glasses came from Public Welfare. At home he went to bed at sunset to save on electricity. . . . He wouldn't even let me invite him to a good restaurant. We were condemned to splitting the bill and eating at the Maubert Self, a cafeteria, or nibbling on cheese and apples we'd bought at the basement supermarket next to the Metro Saint-Paul.

Always a resourceful tour guide, White is content in the main to point out the sites and let it go at that.

Ann Beattie has always seemed to me essentially a writer of short fiction, although from the beginning of her career, with *Chilly Scenes of Winter* and *Distortion*, both published in 1976, her long fiction has kept pace with her volumes of stories. The new novel is her fifth and longest, surely her most ambitious.[6] *Another You* eschews (as did *Picturing Will*, her last) the minimalist style of her earlier work and moves a good deal closer to realism, indeed—if it does not sound too demeaning—to conventional novelese. In *Picturing Will* things got terribly out of control in a rash of digressive, sentimental writing about a child who was scarcely there on the page. *Another You*, like all Beattie's work, is more than occasionally trying of a reader's patience, but cumulatively makes a kind of aesthetic and human sense. Its main character, Marshall Lockard, is a college English teacher in New Hampshire who becomes mildly involved with a female student; meanwhile his wife is currently having an affair, his stepmother is dying, and his family past is a complicated one indeed. Just how complicated we don't find out until later, when the at first mysterious and annoying italicized letters that cap many of the early chapters are finally explained.

I've always resisted complaining that a novelist's characters aren't worthy subjects for fiction because they don't measure up as interesting human beings we can take seriously. But that complaint, in reading Ann

[6] ANOTHER YOU, by *Ann Beattie*. Alfred A. Knopf. $24.00.

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Beattie, sometimes quivers on the horizon. When her mode is strongly satiric, as in *Secrets and Surprises* and the earlier stories, one doesn't ask for "serious" three-dimensional actors. But in *Another You* she is mainly unsatiric, asking us to care about the lives she presents. So as an English teacher I had trouble with Marshall Lockard, whose relation to literature surfaces only occasionally, in less than convincing gulps: "He thought of the concluding lines of Yeats's brilliant poem 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' "; "the beautiful closing line of Yeats's 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' passed quickly through his mind"; "He wondered, idly, if there was any poem that contained the word 'banana' " (I could have quoted him Wallace Stevens' *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*—"And là-bas, là-bas, the cool bananas grew, / Hung heavily on the great banana tree") which, as a teacher of modern poetry, Marshall should know about.

What really does convince is Beattie's marvelous way with the common stuff of life, like preparing to take a shower in a motel you've rolled into dead tired and that turns out to be just what the doctor ordered:

> A thick white terrycloth robe hung from a hanger suspended from a hook on the back of the bathroom door. He removed the robe and draped it over the top of the shower door, spent a few seconds figuring out how the faucet worked while admiring the heaviness of the brass. The bath mat was rolled and placed in a deep-chrome-plated basket attached to the tile at the back wall of the shower, along with a back scrubber enclosed in plastic. Standing under the strong force of the shower, he unwrapped the soap, tossing the wrapper sideways, over his head. . . . He washed his hair with the soap—something Sonja strongly disapproved of, saying it made his hair look like it had been struck by lightning—then massaged each shoulder as he dialed the showerhead clockwise, increasing the force of the water.

This is the sort of thing I read Beattie for, rather than any moral or even dramatic content—although the surprise final section of this novel, "Coconut Grove," is impressive, both historically and humanly. Whatever doubt one has about *Another You* overall, there's no question about the writer's commitment to form in the novel, nor any doubt, at least in my mind, that this is the best full-length fiction she's produced.

No more than a comment here about Richard Powers' fifth novel, since I've not read the earlier ones and since too many times I felt overpowered and underqualified to move through the sentences of *Galatea 22*.[7] There is much that is remarkable about this book, in which the attempt is to program a machine with the literary canon so it can pass the equivalent of a Ph.D. exam on the subject. Woven into the story is the protagonist's history (he seems to have written Richard Powers'

[7] GALATEA 22, by *Richard Powers*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $23.00.

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earlier novels) and enough references to English and American poems to excite any English teacher, let alone a computer. Unfortunately your friendly reviewer still thinks the height of technological sophistication is an IBM Selectric II typewriter with a corrector ribbon, so I was helpless before this sort of thing:

> A workable learning algorithm can run on any platform. The brain, Lentz had it, was itself just a glorified, fudged-up Turing machine. Our cerebrum-to-be had no neurons, per se. No axions or dendrites. No synaptic connections. All these structures hid in simulation, dummied up in the standard linear memory array. The bare troika of Boolean operators brought them into metaphorical being. We used algorithms to imitate a non-algorithmic system. Implementation A was a ghostly hologram. It froze our words the way a scribbled shopping list, falling from a book where it has spent a misplaced lifetime, revives that longhand you thought you'd live alongside forever.

From reading around in Powers' last one, *The Goldbug Variations*, I can assure you that *Galatea 22* is "easier" than its predecessor, if that's a consolation. He's altogether formidable, brilliant, a genius, and in my current state of technological sophistication, which may never improve, I can't read him with more than occasional success.

In 1986 Sue Miller published her first novel, *The Good Mother*, to something like acclaim. Whatever reservations reviewers had about this first-person narrative about a woman separated from her husband and coping with a three-year-old daughter, they recognized the arrival of an intelligently observant, morally caring writer. *Family Pictures* (1990) her second and longest book, explored domestic and familial life in patient even excessive detail; while *For Love* (1993), a sometimes painful novel with a strong greater Boston locale, showed her experimenting with narrative, sometimes with striking effects. I think it's interesting that the new novel is also her shortest and most handsomely shaped.[8] *The Distinguished Guest*, a title whose irony is not a cruel one, is about an architect and his wife who temporarily take in the man's mother who is suffering from Parkinson's disease and preparing to move into a retirement home. The mother, Lily Maynard, happens to have written, late in life, a successful memoir about her marriage to and separation from a minister active in the civil rights movement. Into the triangle thus constituted are drawn, among others, a woman journalist who comes to interview Lily in the course of writing a profile of her, and who is drawn to the architect. Like other realist novels—*Middlemarch* being the best of them—society is a web whose filaments and interconnections the novelist is concerned to trace.

As always, it's hard to quote from Sue Miller by way of showing

[8] THE DISTINGUISHED GUEST, by *Sue Miller*. HarperCollins. $24.00.

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anything except how unobtrusive and unperforming is her style. I can't think of any contemporary writer less interested in showing off by writing dazzling sentences for our admiration; rather, her prose exists always for the "felt life" (Henry James's term) it can convey. In Miller's view, the only obligation a novelist has toward a reader is to be—in another Jamesian word—"interesting." The significant event of this novel is Lily's decision, made in a momentary access of energy—perhaps, she feels, the last one for this Parkinson's sufferer—to kill herself. The riveting chapter in which she accomplishes this begins in the morning:

> Lily woke to the wind, its song calm in her limbs. She lay still and watched its long, sustained swing in the branches outside her window. In answer to it, it seemed, she was changed, her body felt transformed, magically—heavy and powerful. She had a sense of responsive muscle and sinew that she would have said she didn't remember, but now that it had been returned to her was as deeply familiar as her sense of her own weight. The rain had stopped in the night, but the sky was a pearly gray-yellow, a beautiful, dangerous color. The wind was slow and deep, and Lily understood that she was held in it, as though it were a boat on a slowly rocking ocean, that its dragging rhythm was what had brought her body peace.

Nothing special here except attentive fidelity to the weight of things registered. Miller has impressive sympathies with the mind of Lily Maynard; but even more impressive (again, like George Eliot) is her disinterested treatment of the other characters with their other, often cross, purposes. The novelist is everywhere apparent, yet nowhere specially visible in preference or approval. She doesn't have ideas about life because she's too busy showing men and women acting upon ideas—living, as it were. At any rate, with this fourth novel in ten years, Sue Miller is in the forefront of American novelists whose books are written for adults.

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

The Green and the Grey

Grau, theurer Freund, ist aller Theorie,
Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.

LIGHTED WITH THE UNCANNY PRESCIENCE THE PRESENT CONFERS upon the past, Goethe's lines leap out from the page, whether we encounter them in *Faust*, or as an epigraph to open a collection of essays critiquing what today is called Critical Theory—if not theory *tout court*. The tree of life is green and golden. Theory, all theory, is grey. Bleak winter weather occludes the literature we have loved. And yet, do not the lines flaunt their deconstructability? Do they not call for exactly that hermeneutic suspicion—M.H. Abrams' phrase—which is one of Theory's wintry gifts? It is Mephistopheles who speaks them, after all, the Spirit that Denies, if not out and out the Father of Lies.

Indeed the contributors to this symposium (held at the University of Alabama in 1992) are far too canny to dismiss Theory in an access of what one of them skewers as "geriatric rage."[1] It's an impressive group: Abrams is joined by Frederick Crews, Richard Levin, Gary Saul Morson, Nina Baym, Ihab Hassan, David Lehman, Paisley Livingston, and John Searle, critics and scholars who have made it their business to know what they are talking about. Having done so, they can and will give Theory its due. Enjoyable as it may be, in Lehman's words, to "deconstruct deconstruction, deride Derrida, and demand that de Man be held accountable," seductive as is the mood of rage or lament, they are aware that "a critique is not a polemic" (Abrams) nor a polemic a critique. Most of them would agree that, as Dwight Eddins says in his elegant introduction, "the theory world is a useful place to visit," though "you wouldn't want to live there."

If you're young and hoping to make it in the academic world, of course, a visit is not only useful but required, and you can expect to make it a long one. There are institutional reasons for the rise of Theory. Critical approaches grow stalely familiar; "You bore yourself and bore your students," as Mephistopheles told Faust. The job market shrinks; the pressure to publish or perish increases. As Abrams points out, "many of our graduate students have families to support, and it would be less than humane to insist that they ignore the patent institutional connection between jobs, publication, and the exploitation

[1] THE EMPEROR REDRESSED: Critiquing Critical Theory, ed. and with an Introduction by *Dwight Eddins*. The University of Alabama Press. $34.95.

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of viewpoints that guarantee new and eminently publishable ways" to approach "old and oft-discussed texts."

But it's not just economics that makes "students turn to theory like moths, their appetite for flames greater than their appetite for poetry." Ihab Hassan writes as "a reluctant critic," troubled by what he sees as "the resistance to literature." Still, he recognizes that "theory has often—and often rightly—dazzled." Its "cerebral virtuosity," its broad interdisciplinary aspirations, its invitation to the pleasures of suspicion, have proved profoundly attractive, with an attraction not all of which can be explained by Derridean dazzlement.

For suspicion has genuine uses. We can think of it as the extreme form of a process that all serious readers of literature, including those who love it, have found rewarding: close attention to language, scrutiny of the text, the discovery of new questions, some of them embarrassing. One can read too innocently, accept too readily, let too much go unchallenged. Unless we are to reduce ourselves to outmoded huffers and puffers, we must concede that most of us have all too often done exactly that. Have the works we've called great all been seamless and coherent, as the New Critics taught us to insist? Are they really greater, or more rewarding, than other works we might have read, learned from, taught? What—and who—has been hidden from us in historical or political unconsciousness, in the absences, on the margins, in what went unsaid, uncomprehended, excluded? Or in what was in fact included, if only we had been suspicious enough to tease it out? What are the limits of comprehension? Is language itself, in which (Abrams) "we live and move and have our meanings," not merely a web but a veil, so that we must doubt that it can communicate anything at all to us that it does not simultaneously retract?

Big questions, these. We have no choice but to recognize, with Frederick Crews, that "the body of literary theory and practice known as poststructuralism" ("the discourse that itself reduces all things to discourse") "has altered our intellectual style in ways that will probably linger for generations." Unless we think the academy reached the millennium in the mid-sixties, that can't be all bad. Every establishment can use a little destabilizing now and then. "Poststructuralists" (some in this collection call them "postmodernists," without it seeming to matter much) "have helped even their adversaries to realize that selfhood is shaped in part by tacit ideology, that 'truth' often does the bidding of power, and that we should always ask whose interests are being served by a given claim to intellectual or cultural authority."

Crews's sentence assumes a reader who needs to be reminded, rather than informed of what's been going on. Abrams fills us in more fully. Opening the symposium with "a brief overview," he sets himself a humanist's task: to look at current theories "from within," "to ask what features and considerations have made them seem not only credible but compelling to highly intelligent and knowledgeable proponents, and to indicate the kinds of insights such theories have achieved that those of

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us who take an alternative intellectual stand would do well to heed." "One would have to read the major innovative theorists in what Jonathan Swift sardonically called 'the true spirit of controversy'—that is, 'fully predetermined against all conviction'—not to find a great deal that is profitable and enlightening in what these theorists have to say." Such civility, admirable for its own sake, enormously enhances the usefulness of this lively and readable volume. Abrams abstracts the most influential ideas of critical theory with such clarity and fairness that even latecomers to the culture wars can use his chapter to discover, if not everything, at least a not negligible something, of what all the shouting is about.

The "alternative intellectual stand" to which Abrams is committed is implicit in his title: "What Is a Humanistic Criticism?" But the question cannot even be asked without taking account of what has been going on in "the theory world" while a lot of us weren't looking. The very word "humanistic" has become suspect, its positive charge rendered negative by a concerted onslaught on "the interrelated concepts of 'humanity,' 'human,' 'man,' 'the subject,' 'subjectivity,' 'the person,' and 'the self.' " Should latecomers find this hard to believe, Abrams quotes: "The subject is no more than an effect of language" (Barthes). The deconstructive mode "tries to pass beyond man and humanism" (Derrida). "It is a source of profound relief that man is . . . a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form" (Foucault). And as man dissolves a lot that we've taken for granted dissolves with him, or, of course, her: the author; his/her intentionality; the "work," now rechristened a "text"; the personal responsibility of the agents within it and outside it; most crucial, its traditional "power of referring to a world of . . . persons, actions, things, and events." Writing is no longer a purposive activity, let alone a communicative transaction, more or less effective, between human beings. As Derrida famously said, "there is nothing outside the text."

And if such an apotheosis of language seems too rarefied, even, perish the thought, elitist, one can thicken the air a bit by "adapt[ing] poststructural theory to a radical politics." One can even "replace capitalism by humanism," making its " 'commitment to the sovereign individual' " responsible for "forms of injustice and oppression, from imperialism and consumerism to the imposition of a core curriculum in liberal arts colleges." One can argue that "in Western thought and culture, appeals to the essential and universal nature of mankind have in fact served to empower, while masking, all forms of social, racial, and sexual repression." One can enlist "the originary violence of language" (Derrida) into a vocabulary of underground warfare, as normally pacific academics "undermine" and "subvert" with a revolutionary enthusiasm which belies the fact that, true to its own theory, such language refers to, and commits to, no action in the inconveniently real world.

Yes, attempts to give theory its due will slide into irony, if not actual

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polemic. ("Slippage" is the going word, although I'm not sure I'm using it right. But never mind; the vocabulary escapes its originators, as David Lehman shows in his lively survey of the penetration of "deconstruction" into popular *parole.*) Not all the symposiasts are as measured as Abrams, and there are limits even to his generosity. We are, after all, out to redress the emperor. Theory has assumed an imperial mode, and "emperors' fashions," as Dwight Eddins remarks, "must be scrutinized from time to time to make sure that claims of definitive and elegant coverage are justified, that indecent exposure is subjected to exposé." The witty cover drawing of this elegantly produced book shows a Janus-faced potentate, gazing into twin mirrors which, we may guess, are showing him mutually incompatible images. He is, of course, naked, kept decent only by a robe of paper streamers. Each bears a name of power: Derrida, Foucault, de Man, Kristeva, Lacan, Marx, Freud, Jameson. The emperor stares into his mirrors. One of his faces seems merely attentive. The other registers a somewhat surprised concern, as of one who has succeeded in deconstructing himself. But help is on the way; not a newer set of garments, but cast-off old ones. They weren't thrown away, it seems, and defamiliarized by their sojourn in the attic, a lot of us will think they look better than ever.

For instance, this is the definition that Abrams finally arrives at: a humanistic criticism is a criticism "that deals with a work of literature as composed by a human being, for human beings, and about human beings and matters of human concern. . . ." That it should be necessary to argue one's way to something so obvious is a measure of how far, within a generation, literary theory has been able to distance itself from the common experience of writers and readers. It is as if it had, in Abrams' words, been "written by extraterrestrials."

It takes courage to wear garments long out of fashion; we may be glad, and grateful, to see the emperor's serviceable old tweeds (so like our own) reconditioned and in use. David Lehman signals his "stubborn attachment to concepts that have presumably received dishonorable discharges in the courts-martial of academic discourse," not only the self, but "other unfashionable abstractions": "freedom, art, genius, greatness." Nina Baym, too, reaffirms the self, individuality, subjectivity, eschewing Lacanian feminism for one based on—imagine!—"Western Enlightenment liberalism," since it ill behoves those who claim to speak for the marginalized to reject the idea of universal human nature that must ground the idea of universal human rights, the rights of women among them. Even morality returns; Abrams recalls a criticism that understood that "the reading of literature, even *as* literature, often involves making moral discriminations and moral judgments," and Baym goes so far as to say that "Moral significance has always been the main criterion for literary value." Bravest of all, perhaps, in its unashamed recall of the state of innocence in which we used to read, is Ihab Hassan's "willed confession." His lyric reverie turns tweeds into silk as he celebrates "the rogue power of literature," remembering how

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once he came upon Beauty and Truth "in wayward places—attic boxes, books forgotten on a park bench, street stalls piled high with yellowing tomes."

> No doubt, I read then, as we do in youth, naively. But what does "naive" mean? That I read, ignorant of other readings, in the hot glow of my own needs? True enough. Yet those same needs first brought me to literature and still speak in primal sympathy with the best I read.

He reads, still, "as books move me" (he doesn't say "texts"), "wakefully, with ardor, memory, attention, . . . courteously and in the spirit that first brought me to literature[,] though mindful of contingency and the bristling years."

To read courteously—though he doesn't use the word, Saul Morson has something close to it in mind when he asks our suspicious theorists to suspect their own tendency to judge "great thinkers and writers of the past" "according to the political orthodoxies of the present." It's anachronistic, it's immodest, it's discourteous. It reminds him, and should remind us, of that nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia that was so sure of its apocalyptic "claims to have discovered the One True Theory." They were, like all such claims, only claims. "The intelligentsia revered science, but . . . one aspect of science it never borrowed was a skeptical weighing of evidence and a willingness to submit theories to falsifiable tests."

The critiques in this book offer much more than comforting and much needed affirmations of what once was obvious. Equally necessary, more necessary to some, is the confrontation of the assumptions of critical theory by argument based on evidence. Though each of the contributors brings different preoccupations to the task of redressing the emperor, all sound this common theme. Though the style may range from Hassan's lyricism to the logical rigor of Livingston and Searle, all recognize in what Searle calls Grand Theory a totalizing coerciveness; all call for the evaluation of its truth claims by the tests of practice, of experience, literary and lived. So tested, they say and show, it simply doesn't *work*. The operative words recur in context after context: "Practice," "practical," "pragmatic"; most of all "empirical" and "empiricism." The claim that all texts are political? "In practice, there are different kinds of of texts" (Hassan). "[A]n a priori and empirically incorrigible critical procedure can result only in political pseudo-discoveries" (Abrams). For Crews "the empirical" is "simply" (someone will get him on that word, but it won't be me) "the ethic of respecting what is known, acknowledging what is still unknown, and acting as if one cared about the difference"; Livingston writes of the imperative, in writing and thinking, of "ascertaining what is actually the case."

And that is what the contributors to this book do. They do what most

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of us are unqualified to do, including this reviewer: they put the claims of theory to the test. We may be grateful to them for taking on a task for which we were too busy, too easily bored, too lazy, perhaps, or too hostile, to prepare ourselves to perform. We had our excuses: no theory was ever greyer, more securely hidden in linguistic cloud. Few of us will risk refuting theoretical positions we're not sure we understand. Hence the need for a star assemblage to do it for us, to strengthen our conviction that distrust is better grounded than we ourselves can show.

Empiricism, of course, is less likely to impress than Grand Theory. It's not at all grand. It avoids the absolute statement, it qualifies, it is in every sense *unassuming*. Does language, in Derrida's words, "leave us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say), to say something other than what we say *and* would have wanted to say, to understand something other than . . . , etc."? Empiricism quietly objects that what this incredible sentence seems to be saying seems not to be the case, that if we investigate what Abrams calls "language-in-use," we find "that we often manage very well to say what we mean and to understand what someone else has undertaken to say." If you think that's obvious, you must have been wasting your time reading novels (which Derrida, significantly, says don't much interest him), or talking to other human beings.

Abrams yearns for no transcendental guarantor; like the other contributors, he is at home in a world without absolutes. "To the empirical enquirer into our practice of language, the index of success in communication is more modest than absolute certainty; it is practical certainty, an adequate assurance that we have understood each other." And he adds, "it remains always and unavoidably possible, however, that we have got the thing wrong." Whereas a radical poststructuralist "sets out from a theoretical predetermination of the necessary nature of language as such" from which he deduces his conclusions rather than inducing them from the actual world of human experience. This is what Crews and others mean by "a priorism," "the typical way of proceeding," says Abrams,

> of all-out practitioners of deconstructive criticism. It is also the procedure of the radical Foucauldians who reason down from the universal premise that all discourse, hence all thought and knowledge, consists of cultural constructs that are effected and directed by the forms and circulation of power; or of the poststructural Marxists who reason down from the premise that all discourse is constituted by an ideology in the secret service of class interest or a controlling elite; or of that special group of poststructural feminists who reason down from the premise that all Western discourse is inherently and in totality phallocentric, thereby disqualifying *a priori* all possible counterclaims (and for that matter their own discursive claims) as necessarily and irredeemably sexist. In this way a theoretical position that may have value as an adventure in vision, or as a speculative

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instrument for discovery, suffers a hardening of the categories and becomes a Grand Theory.

No wonder the theory world is grey. It is no world that we inhabit, and its instigators don't inhabit it either. "In the everyday conduct of life, when something turns up that engages a theorist's moral or political or personal concerns, he abandons theory-talk for the ordinary human-centered talk about intentional persons, what they say and mean, and their intellectual and moral responsibility for what they have said." If you prick them, do they not bleed? You bet they do, and they fuss as much as any author when they feel they've been misread. Inconsistent? Why be constrained by a logocentric straitjacket? The emperor of deconstruction holds two mirrors, and he's not about to give up either one.

Abrams is under no illusions concerning the power of rational argument. "The deep-rooted and ever-reviving disputes that make up the history of philosophy indicate that there is no knock-down, drag-out argument that will dislodge a proponent from an initiating position." His last section focuses, then, not on argument but experience. The theory world is not only uninhabitable, it is unrecognizable by ourselves, who in the absence of extraterrestrials are the only ones around to recognize it. It is simply—yes, simply—incredible. Luckily, we are human beings before we are philosophers, as our very contradictions affirm. There is a passage beyond argument, or perhaps life argues for itself. Deconstructionists, poststructuralists, postmodernists, the great ones, the reigning epigones, and most of all the continuing generations of students, live as well as theorize. The tree of life is there. And the color of hope is green.

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HAROLD FROMM

"Reason" or *Volksgeist*?

ALAIN FINKIELKRAUT, A PREEMINENT PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL IN FRANCE, is relatively unknown in the United States. Trained in literature and philosophy, he is a journal editor, radio talk show host, and author of books on nationalism, identity politics, Jewish affairs and Hannah Arendt. Although in his youth he was what we now refer to as a sixties intellectual, he has gradually pulled away from the political positions characteristic of that period and become a spokesman for classical democratic ideals that fly in the face of postmodern nihilism or, perhaps more accurately, postmodern everythingism. It is not insignificant that his translator, Judith Friedlander, ends her preface by remarking: "After giving the matter a good deal of thought, I decided not to follow any of the conventions currently in use to neutralize the gender of the third-person singular pronoun. *The Defeat of the Mind*[1] embraces a tradition that created the ideal of the abstract individual: where *he* stood uncontested for both *him* and *her*."

Finkielkraut's book is essentially a defense of the Enlightenment and a polemic against multiculturalism's professions of contempt for dead white Eurocentric male culture. Its method is narrative, a story of sorts that attempts to show how we got from the democratic ideals of eighteenth-century France to the repressive identity politics of postmodernism. Three books from the sixties seem to lurk behind Finkielkraut's account: Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which is in fact mentioned several times; Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Fanon's book, a powerful and often brilliant denunciation of Western colonialism and a manual of revolution for Third World countries, attacks the educational system as an arm of the established order (an idea to be developed later on by Althusser) while mocking the West's belief in eternal values, stemming from Plato. It disparages the veneration of the individual as well as the humanist-universal "Man," preferring the revolutionary collective in which private consciousness doesn't much matter. It recommends a recuperation of the indigenous cultures of colonized countries in place of Western values, looks sympathetically upon African "negritude," but finally extolls the forging of national, rather than purely ethnic, identities that are opposed to the values of the West. Not

[1] THE DEFEAT OF THE MIND, by *Alain Finkielkraut*. Trans. & intro. by *Judith Friedlander*. Columbia University Press. $22.95.

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without some justification, Fanon urges, "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them," but his discussions of socialism have been rendered ludicrously maladroit by the madcap turns of history.

Paulo Freire's pedagogical spinoff of Fanon, still a cult book in American schools and academia despite its revolution-oriented sixties ethos and Latin American classroom context (both irrelevant to U.S. education in the nineties), is the product of a single-stringed, dull-witted mentality that has probably cheered on a good deal of the mindless blather that passes for pedagogy among guilt-stricken, consumption-oriented bourgeois in North America. Its browbeatings of the "banking theory" of education, which pours acceptance of oppression into the passive psyches of the oppressed, reads like an unwitting parody of Dickens' *Hard Times* that makes oppression begin to look intelligently attractive.

Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, dipped into again after many years, seems more bombastic and raving than ever, with long long stretches of totally incomprehensible prose. Its thesis, just barely extractable from the farrago of intemperate chapters, is that the liberating rationality of the Enlightenment has gradually been perverted into the enslaving, calculating, rationalized, computerized market-*über-alles* of consumer capitalism, a logic of domination by the iron laws of profitability and what we now call the global economy. For all its paranoia and liabilities as a statement, this book still has valuable things to say in an era of increasing corporate mergers and computer archives romanced by a Republican Congress that leaves nothing to chance in its zeal to foster economic growth for the haves.

It is Finkielkraut's task to mitigate this indictment of Western rationality (now seen as social control) and humanism (now seen as high-minded colonialism) that is an implicit or explicit theme in all these books, especially this indictment's latest incarnation as "multiculturalism," an assault on the European masculine mentality that has largely shaped our institutions for hundreds of years. His key term is "culture" in its now multiple meanings: as the life of the mind (does this require quotation marks when used today?) and as the totality of behaviors in any given society. "Why give preference to one over the other?" he asks with irony. "Why privilege thinking over knitting, or chewing betel nuts, or performing the ancestral morning rite of dunking a piece of thickly buttered toast into a cup of hot coffee?" Postmodern egalitarianism's mission has been to level all these things, to demolish the "high" from "high culture" and represent almost (but not quite) everything as holy. Although Finkielkraut's European emphasis precludes extensive references to American culture, there has been a steady stream of related movements in American society since the sixties, from the now-obsolete cult of "black English" (dear to privileged whites but less dear to socially entrapped blacks) and Spanish-English bilingualism (less desired by Latinos than by bourgeois pedagogues) to the academic obsession with

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popular culture (a cornucopia for doctoral theses) and the raiding of the legal system by victimization cases (a gold mine for lawyers). The essence of postmodernism is to avoid making distinctions, to eschew hierarchies, repudiate systems, regard the physical sciences as little more than a specialized rhetoric (except when you rush off to the emergency room). Or as an earnest young male student once asked me: "Why do you have to judge us?" To which I found myself replying: "Do you ask ugly girls out on dates?" (Spoken today, such a remark would trigger a sexual harassment case, front-page stories in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Lingua Franca*, and would put me into the hands of jackbooted sensitivity-training therapists.)

For Finkielkraut, the achievement of eighteenth-century philosophes was to emancipate people from their conditions, their countries, their classes and recognize them as individuals sharing abstract qualities of "mankind." Their worth derived from participation in transcendental mind, spirit, reason and was not based on the particularities of their circumstances. (And though he does not mention it, the United States was uniquely founded on these universals.) Finkielkraut keeps returning to the writings of Renan and Goethe as exemplary proponents of this universalism: "Before French culture, German culture and Italian culture, there is human culture" (Renan); "The value of anything with true merit lies in its belonging to all humanity" (Goethe). Remarks like these, however, are today notably out of style, a state of affairs that Finkielkraut traces back to the concept of the *Volksgeist*, whose founding moment he establishes as 1774, in the writings of J.G. Herder.

> Herder wanted to put an end to the idea he deemed false, that you could evaluate human creations out of context, remove them from the place where they had been produced, and judge them according to timeless criteria of what is Good, True, or Beautiful. Instead of measuring facts by a set of ideal norms, he showed that the norms themselves had not always existed. They too belonged to a particular context, to a history that began at some point in time. . . . There was no absolute, Herder proclaimed—only regional values and contingent principles.

Herder was especially hard on Voltaire, whom he criticized for mistaking the principles of Enlightenment France for an eternal Reason good for all times and places. Instead, he believed, each country, each ethnic group had its own operating principles, values, tastes, and they were all that mattered. This particular mix of prejudices characterizing each group is what has now come to be called "a culture," as opposed to "culture," which implies a shared tradition that transcends local customs. Finkielkraut traces the ups and downs of the principle of the *Volksgeist*, the particular spirit that characterizes a people, through German and French history since the eighteenth century and through a number of modern academic disciplines. And if it all sounds—both to

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him and to us—painfully familiar, it is because we know it only too well in its current guise as multiculturalism.

Having been liberated from the tyrannies of nations, despots, and divine laws, individuals were oppressed anew, writes Finkielkraut, by the romantic century's fascination with the *Volksgeist.* Now they were to be enslaved by their very identities as specimens of a people, of a race. "Here were subjects literally *embodied* by the oppression that held them victim." It would be their "blood" rather than their individual wills that acquired the legitimacy to determine their behavior. Although at first ethnic differences provided grounds for preferring one's own indigenous mix as superior to all others, the breakdown of European colonialism eventually produced a surprising transformation among Western intellectuals: after years of treating "ethnics" as inferior to white Europeans, anthropologists like Lévi-Strauss began to cite Western ethnocentrism as an arrogant denial of other forms of humanity that sprang from the Enlightenment's privileging of certain types of "reason," science, and progress as the hallmarks of "civilization." Although the original objective was to destroy prejudice, "it was no longer a matter of opening others to reason, but of opening ourselves to the reason of others." Not only was it necessary to stop extending Western values over the rest of the world but to recognize, as Finkielkraut ironically puts it, that "we, the so-called civilized ones, should come down from our imaginary heights and recognize with humble clarity that we were only another kind of native."

Finkielkraut sees Lévi-Strauss, the creator of structural anthropology, as a primary wielder of the monkey wrench that began to destroy the philosophic foundations of the Western tradition. In place of a linear view of history, a shared human nature, a Reason permeating all brains with a Kantian categoricalness, the social sciences and then the humanities have gradually dynamited the chief structural members of this edifice, seeing instead discontinuity, diversity, and multiple authenticities. If Fanon could be said to have nourished the violence that brought African colonialism to an end, Freire is still putting in lecture appearances on the American academic circuit to badmouth education. Students have become the American equivalent of colonized nations. Or as Finkielkraut puts it, "To cultivate the common people was to strip them of their authentic being and dress them up in a borrowed identity, the way colonists clothed the tribes of Africa. . . ." This leveling egalitarianism lies behind the now widespread view that everything is equally a text: a Beethoven symphony and a video by Madonna, a Jane Austen novel and a TV sitcom. (Lawrence Levine's 1988 book, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America,* was an attempt to show how porous is the demarcation between high and low culture, but his leveling maneuvers were not altogether convincing.) A certain kind of bourgeois guilt has now made it fashionable to speak for the Other. Hence, the idealization of the Third World, of the biosphere, of trees and animals, of the disadvantaged, the downtrodden. These phenom-

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ena somehow are imbued with a virtue that "we" as oppressors do not have. (Ventriloquism, one might say, is the latest medium for a power grab.)

As Finkielkraut describes it, "Left to themselves, the formerly colonized became their own captives, stuck in a collective identity that had freed them from the tyranny of European values. No sooner had they said, 'We won,' than they lost the right to express themselves in anything but the first person plural." The consequence of decolonization has often been one-party rule, repressive bureaucracy, human rights violations and the spreading savagery of ethnic strife, as we see in different forms in Africa, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and India. Although Finkielkraut refers to science as the lone discipline to have escaped the new laws of relativity, the situation has markedly changed since the original publication of his book in 1987. Today, the academic left regards the sciences as just another form of rhetoric, another text, another take on experience. (See the extremely urbane and well-informed analysis of this view, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science,* by Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt, 1994, Johns Hopkins UP: "*Perspectivism on the left is the true legacy of the activism of the 1960s and early 1970s,* a time when it was assumed that the oppressed are endowed with uniquely privileged insights, and that the intellectual, as well as moral authority of victims is beyond challenge.")

Toward the end of this brief polemical book, Finkielkraut hurls his own monkey wrench into the juggernaut of egalitarian multiculturalism:

> In a world deserted by transcendence, fanatics no longer evoke the name of God to justify barbaric customs; they call on identity politics instead. . . . But what if a culture teaches people to inflict corporal punishment on delinquents, to reject barren women, to kill adulterous women, to consider the testimony of one man the same as the testimony of two women, to give a sister only half as much inheritance as her brother, to perform female circumcision, to forbid mixed marriages and permit polygamy? To love our neighbor must we respect these customs?

These are crux questions about multiculturalism and they are frequently in the news. During the brief period while I was reading this book, I clipped two instances of such questions from the *New York Times* alone: an excellent Op-Ed piece by A. M. Rosenthal (June 13, 1995) on female circumcision and a long article by George Johnson (June 24, 1995) about an annual rite in New Mexico known as the rooster pull in which a rooster is torn apart alive. The article's title says it all: "In New Mexico, an Ancient Rite or a Blood Sport?" Thus, concern for the Other can often conflict with the doctrine that everything is as good as everything else, a doctrine I am convinced nobody really believes, except when questioned by pollsters or filling out tenure papers. Finkielkraut's overview tries to reconcile the contradictions: "The spirit of modern

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Europe accommodates itself very well to the existence of ethnic or religious minorities, on condition that they conform to a model of a nation comprised of free and equal individuals. This demand carries along with it the rejection of all practices . . . that reject the basic rights of human beings."

The Defeat of the Mind's final section looks at what has happened to the arts as a result of multicultural egalitarianism and postmodern eclecticism, namely, that the perils are great if you refuse to equate Beethoven and Bob Marley, "even though one of them is white and the other black"! The life of the mind, in this dispensation, is no better than a day at the racetrack. "To be an elitist . . . is no longer a matter of refusing to give culture to the people but of refusing to apply the label 'cultural' to any form of distraction that may come along." But these attitudes are now so familiar that there is little point in pressing them any further.

As someone who is not a scientist or social scientist, not a professional philosopher, not a trained historian, but just an off-the-wall humanist type who still values the legacy of the Enlightenment, I'd like to take advantage of the egalitarian voice I have been given in order to push my own perceptions (which, of course, are as good as anybody else's): firstly, after the fall of the Soviet Union and after general decolonization of the Third World, what has ensued are vicious ethnic wars followed by fierce scrambles to Westernize and get a cut of the global economy. The West may be a cesspool of evil, but it is a cesspool in which a lot of different *Volksgeist*s want to muck around.

Secondly, despite Foucault and postmodern "discontinuity," despite Reason being an imposture for reasons, despite the virtues of diversity, despite the horrors of Western technology and the highbrow disbelief in "progress," my own view is that if life were to be invented all over again and proceed through billions of years of evolution all over again, with consciousness evolving all over again, the outcome would not be radically different in the second go-around from what has evolved in the first, suggesting there is a "logic" or "reason" animating existence. Once you figure out how to wipe your behind, the Sears Tower can't be too many millions of years in the distance. Intelligent tool-making creatures would reinvent the wheel, and having done so would continue down the slippery slope of technology. Medicine men and doctors and MRI machines for diagnosing bodily malfunctions would appear all over again because all creatures want to be well and avoid death. Art would be again produced, first as practical religious totems and later as aesthetic objects. Maybe there wouldn't be Beethoven or the Beatles this time, but equivalents would doubtless arise. (I realize my examples are hopelessly Eurocentric, but my *Volksgeist* made me do it.) Religions and morality and education would redevelop once again to help these second-wave creatures to co-exist (even though our own institutions have often fared pretty badly). In a few words, then, there are basic survival mechanisms that seem built into lifeforms that survive. When these mechanisms reach the point of reflecting upon themselves, the

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process is called intelligence or reason. What *we* in particular call Reason may, admittedly, be a little peremptory at times in its absolutist self-confidence, and the tendency to regard the local as universal is undoubtedly a bad thing, though again related to a program of survival. Although one is no longer allowed to refer to "primitive" cultures, anyone looking at the range of the world's societies would be wilfully obtuse to refuse to see that they invariably move through a similar linear path dictated by the arts of survival and the workings of intelligence, whether you call it Reason or reasons. The West figured out a lot of things first, which is why so many other cultures insist on imitating it, given what I take to be the inner logic of evolutionary survival. But if everything were *really* as good as everything else, no one would believe in evolution, whose central tenet is that everything *isn't* as good as everything else. Once you figure out a way to overcome the infant diarrhea that kills millions of children worldwide, you regard your earlier inability to cure it as "primitive." And when you stop sacrificing people and then animals to the gods, you regard your earlier behavior as "primitive," perhaps even as evil. Moreover, no developed nations ever choose to become undeveloped nations. Everybody except Western white middle class intellectuals of a certain effete vintage believes all this. And even they really believe it too, when they plunk nine dollars down on the counter for a pound of coffee at Starbucks.

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JOSIAH FISK

Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Rosen

CHARLES ROSEN'S NEW BOOK[1] IS A HUGE COLLECTION OF IDEAS: about music, particularly Romantic music, and more particularly Romantic music written for the piano between 1827 and 1850 by Schumann, Chopin and the young Liszt. It is audaciously full of information and observations, illustrated with hundreds of musical examples. It pulls in concepts from literature, painting and philosophy, and it makes detours farther afield, into subjects like madness, politics, social history, kitsch and late-eighteenth-century travel writing. It is the product of a mind with immense capacities of storage and retrieval, and little compunction about using them.

The Romantic Generation does not offer a central thesis, only the many separate theses that crowd within its 710 pages. It begins with a general discussion of the relationship of music to sound; within three paragraphs we are into the musical examples, and a discussion of how Bach's contrapuntal textures were never intended to be perfectly realizable in performance, how by Mozart's time this ideal had been turned upside-down and music had become almost exclusively an art of sonic realization, and how the Romantic era inverted the picture once again, positing "absent melodies" and writing instructions that could never be realized (Beethoven's famous crescendo on a single piano note is one of numerous examples).

In language that is both chatty and imperious—a manner familiar to readers of his well-known *The Classical Style* (1971) and his many essays in the *New York Review of Books*—Rosen begins to rehearse a number of notions about Romantic music. He finds in this period the first usages in Western music of tone color as a motivic or structural element. Even the use of the pedal on the piano became structural, Rosen argues, showing how Haydn, Beethoven and Chopin used the pedal to alter the character of a theme or to create a shift in emphasis or mood.

There is a great deal more in this chapter, although it's just the warm-up. The book starts in earnest with a chapter on the Fragment, a concept made popular by Friedrich Schlegel, who published the following definition, ripe with wit and precision, in 1798:

> A fragment should be like a little work of art, complete in itself and separated from the rest of the universe like a hedgehog.

[1] THE ROMANTIC GENERATION, by *Charles Rosen*. Harvard University Press. $39.95.

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Rosen's musical fragments include songs of Schubert, Beethoven, Liszt and Schumann (particularly *Dichterliebe*), as well as Chopin's Préludes and some of the Nocturnes. In this music, Rosen says, the composers tried to give a sense of incompleteness to individual pieces and often to whole works, experimenting with ambiguous endings (some of them technically resolved but psychologically unresolved, others both technically and psychologically unresolved), as well as with ambiguous beginnings. The Fragments discussion leads to one about the taste for ruins, which leads to one about disorder and the Romantic view of nature as chaos. There is also some exploration of the then-fashionable idea that music was the first, most generalized speech of humankind, with all spoken languages developing out of it.

A third chapter, "Mountains and Song Cycles," delves into relationships between landscape and music. Here things become more complicated, as ideas begin to intermingle with almost queasy abandon. Landscapes become tinged with emotional significance; distance in geography becomes bound up with distance in time; a landscape may be seen as a ruin, which is also a Fragment. Past and present become intermixed, as do music and memory, mountains and death; all becomes mixed with all. Rosen quotes Schiller:

> There are two ways that Nature without living creatures can become a symbol of the human: either as a representation of feelings or as a representation of ideas.
>
> Feelings, indeed, cannot be represented *by their content,* but only by *their form,* and there exists a generally beloved and effective art which has no other object than this form of feelings. This art is *music,* and insofar as landscape painting or landscape poetry works musically, it is a representation of the power of feeling, and consequently an imitation of human nature. In fact, we consider each painterly and poetic composition as a kind of musical work, and we subject them in part to the same laws.

It's hard to read a passage like this without perceiving in it a pronounced, though quite contented, confusion. Perhaps the greatest service of this chapter is that it gives us a clear view of the eagerness of the Romantic age to misprize and conflate all manner of ideas—a taste that lives on in our general cultural views of what constitutes the basis of creativity.

Rosen reminds us that the song cycle was the nineteenth century's most original new form, and he speaks eloquently on the Romantic desire to create a music whose intelligibility would be revealed to the listener only gradually. This idea depended on the awareness that the significance of virtually any event within a piece of music could be altered retroactively—an awareness already latent by the Renaissance and certainly understood by Bach, but never exploited in so conscious a fashion until Beethoven. This, too, proved a powerful notion, one

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which many composers have continued to find viable down to the present day.

With Chapter 4 the poets and landscapes vanish and we are plunged into a technical discussion of the hierarchies of the tonal system and the Romantics' increasing reliance on mediants as substitutes for dominants and subdominants. Rosen, always on the lookout for received wisdom that can be upended, engages in a spirited defense of the four-bar phrase, showing how in the right hands (Chopin's, for instance) it can have life and personality.

There follow three chapters on Chopin in which Rosen takes care to point out how the composer fused a mastery of counterpoint with a mastery of operatic-style melody. The result was a music radically new in feeling and in many of its particulars (harmonies especially), but quite conservative at its roots. Rosen describes how Chopin used Classical techniques to non-Classical ends: for example, by having related keys function as different forms of a single tonal region, rather than opposing one key against another in Classical fashion.

In working with sonata form, which had already become a textbook recipe, Chopin would often stay within the Classical shape but shift the functions of the sections: instead of a development passage of growing intensity leading to a recapitulation that resolves tensions, the development prepares a recapitulation that gives us the opening material in heightened form—in "a magnified aura of brilliance, complexity, tension, violence, and pathos," as Rosen writes. He goes on to note, with a devilish smile, that this is "a more subtle version—and not always so subtle—of the way Liszt brings back his themes five times as loud and with ten times as many notes." It's a well-aimed shot, bagging both composers at once.

There are many affectionate knocks like this in the subsequent chapter on Liszt, who for Rosen is not so much in need of revival as rehabilitation. Rosen sees this as a matter of rescuing Liszt from the reputation created by his "least respectable" works, the Hungarian Rhapsodies, which have earned the scorn of generations of musicians even as they have found their way to cartoon and circus music immortality (he doesn't mention it, but Rosen must have been secretly pleased when one of the rhapsodies, fitted out with perky lyrics, showed up as a jingle for McDonald's some years back).

This is perhaps the best chapter in the book. It sketches the assets and liabilities of a deeply problematic composer, one who innovated less by pure invention than by a sort of creative entrepreneurship. Liszt had a talent for seeing the implications of a new idea and for finding ways to expand and exploit them—often enough, ways the originator of the idea would not likely have found.

In the course of his 75 years, Liszt often returned to earlier pieces to rework them, sometimes recomposing them completely. There are pieces he revisited three and four times, at different periods, and the comparisons are fascinating. Rosen illustrates how Liszt transformed

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some of his early piano pieces almost beyond recognition, more or less creating the high-virtuoso piano technique in the process. With Liszt, Rosen argues, composition *was* performance, to a large extent. Unlike Chopin, who played the music he wrote, Liszt wrote the music he wanted to play.

We also see, in the case of Liszt's *Die Lorelei,* an apparent exchange of influences between Liszt and Wagner. The Wagner reference is the opening of *Tristan,* and the pas de deux between the two composers, as choreographed by Rosen, illuminates the fundamentally different natures of their compositional talents. You begin to understand, after all, how two such colossal egos could have remained devoted lifelong friends. All that is missing here is an explanation of the relationship between the sirens of Liszt's little character piece and the nixies in *Das Rheingold:* surely the existence of two sets of mythical Rhine-cavorting females who sing in a lilting 9/8 time, with lots of parallel thirds and sixths, is not a coincidence.

Less satisfactory is the brief chapter (27 pages) on Berlioz. Perhaps because Berlioz wasn't a piano composer, Rosen seems less interested in him. Even the *Symphonie fantastique* is presented here not as an orchestral work but in Liszt's piano transcription. Opera also gets short shrift, with Bellini, Meyerbeer, Donizetti and Rossini shoehorned into 50 pages (half of them musical examples) which they must share with some belated and unexceptionable pronouncements on bourgeois tastes and the merits of good trash versus bad art. Weber, the inventor of German Romantic opera, is nowhere to be found in this chapter. More intriguing is the chapter on Mendelssohn, whom Rosen considers the inventor of religious kitsch, not in the oratorios or the *Reformation* Symphony but in the preludes and fugues (for piano, naturally enough). Rosen sees in these pieces the attempt to aestheticize religion by replacing specific religious content with a generalized mood of piety.

At the end we return to Schumann, who figured heavily in the first chapters, though the return feels pro forma. This chapter gathers together whatever Schumann observations Rosen hasn't found space for earlier, and they are not his most convincing. Among them is the book's grandest excursion into poetic excess. In the third song from his Heine *Liederkreis,* Schumann sets stanzas one, two and four in B major. Stanza three he sets in G major, harmonically a remote key. The movement to this key is sudden and surprising: there is no modulation, as would have been required by Classical practice, but Schumann's route is nonetheless direct. He takes advantage of the fact that B, the root in B major, is the third of the G-major triad, and he uses the dual identity of this note to bridge directly from one key to the other.

Yet Rosen refuses to acknowledge that stanza three is in G major at all. "When is a key not a key? When it is nothing more than a simple chord; when the relation of tonic and dominant does not function within it; when the tonic note is not the center or the basis of resolution." This seems like casuistry. Schumann does indeed define G major as a

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tonic—he simply uses the subdominant to do it rather than the dominant. Either one does the job perfectly well, but Rosen brushes by this on his way to a loftier destination. The third stanza, he concludes, "is indeed not in G major; but it is not in any other key either."

Rosen's motive here is to underscore the ethereal quality of the third stanza, the feeling it creates of floating in an almost unreal space. But Schumann did not accomplish this by arranging for metaphysics to whoosh in and suspend the laws of harmony for eight bars. Rosen's over-poeticizing doesn't really help us towards a better understanding of Schumann's achievement, nor does it add all it might to our appreciation of the effect Schumann creates.

Indeed, as you read along in this book, imperiousness starts to seem more a matter of substance than style. Some of Rosen's observations are puzzling, as when he says that Beethoven's Op. 126 Bagatelles are not miniatures, or tells us that grace notes in Schumann must always go before the beat while in Chopin they must be played on the beat—especially when he himself does not honor the rule in the Chopin performances on his most recent recordings, one of which is included with the book.[2] It is surprising to see Rosen passing along the hoary notion that Schubert composed *Die Winterreise* as a foreshadowing of his own death. Other observations are flat-out bizarre: Rosen's notion that the juncture of religion and music includes the Chopin Nocturnes and the Brahms piano concerti (no elaboration is given), or his doubting that there ever actually was such a thing as salon music, or his hearing the last two notes of the first theme of Chopin's G minor Ballade as a separate countertheme.

Mostly what is imperious is the way Rosen strides past the commonsensical, and elbows aside the unwanted implications of his own evidence. Sometimes this is merely a matter of omitting the obvious—out of impatience, probably, or forgetfulness. (How else to explain why he fails to note that the recitative in Mendelssohn's E major piano sonata is also a fugue, and then, a few pages on, calls a later recitative-fugue in Mendelssohn an unprecedented synthesis of the two genres?) But in a great many cases, like the *Liederkreis* and Ballade examples, it simply seems that Rosen is in a rush to make a point that is at best eccentric.

So it is that Rosen discusses, in Chopin's Op. 6 #1 Mazurka, the surprising way an F natural becomes an F sharp, without mentioning that the real surprise, in a piece in F-sharp minor, is to encounter an F natural to begin with. It is not merely that the value of Rosen's observation depends on a prior observation that he has not acknowledged, but that the mention of that prior observation would have suggested a somewhat different discussion. Here and throughout the

[2] The CD included with *The Romantic Generation* contains music (some of it as excerpts) of Chopin, Liszt and Schumann. Some of the same tracks may be found, along with other music of the same composers, on a separate CD, also called *The Romantic Generation,* and issued as Musicmasters 01612-67154-2.

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book, Rosen brings in material to suit his own purposes, and he does not seem particularly bothered when his purposes are quite different from those suggested by the material.

In the section on the *Symphonie fantastique,* Rosen notes the "wrong" use of the tonic chord in the first appearance of the *idée fixe*—something theorists have commented upon since the piece was new. By rights the tonic harmony should not appear until a bar later; the "wrong" tonic is an anticipation. This is made quite clear by the fact that an analogous one-bar anticipation occurs nine bars later. Two half-bar anticipations occur ten and 14 bars after the initial anticipation, and 16 bars afterward we get the tonic harmony *two* bars early—or so we think. But at this point Berlioz breaks the sequence in the melody, and we discover that what has actually occurred is that the melody and harmony have come back into synch.

Rosen doesn't mention any of this, preferring to focus on the first "wrong" tonic. He speaks of how it "provides a shock here that Berlioz must have considered indispensable to the first playing of the theme," and that such a harmonization "is possible without loss of meaning above all because the dominant is so clearly implied by the melody itself." If this is not to miss the point, it is at the least an idea that needs to appear within the context of a discussion of the entire series of anticipations.

At the very opening of the first Chopin chapter, Rosen makes a pronouncement on the old question of where the repeat should begin in the exposition of the first movement of the Sonata in B-flat minor (the "Funeral March"). Rosen holds that all modern editions are wrong and that the repeat goes back to the very beginning, not to measure five where the main tempo starts. There are reasons, and he cites them.

But the matter is not so simple. The ii-V-i cadence produced by going back to the very opening has a bass that resolves completely in upward motion, which is very unidiomatic (and invalidates a supposed precedent in the B minor Scherzo, which is in any case quite different from the situation in the sonata). Chopin could have added a low grace note to solve the upward-resolving bass, but that would have destroyed the harmonic and bass-line structures going forward. There is a note added to the V chord which would necessitate a major resolution, not a minor one. As to the fact that an early manuscript, corrected by Chopin, shows no repeat signs at the double bar before measure five, we must at least consider the possibility that Chopin expected pianists to go back to the double bar automatically, whether it had repeat marks on it or not, simply because exposition repeats virtually never included introductions. It's true that repeating to the double bar changes the cadence from ii-V-i to ii-V-vi, and that this does not fall easily on the ear: while it is an ordinary deceptive cadence, it can make you feel you are not yet back to the main key even though you are. But repeating to the beginning does not fall easily on the ear, either. Little wonder most pianists skip the repeat and move straight on to the development.

So in short, both repeat options have merits, and both have problems. If the right answer were obvious, the matter would have been settled a

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century and a half ago. It may be in this case that Rosen is right, as he so often is. But dismissing one option as "musical nonsense," as Rosen does with the double-bar repeat, does not do justice to the question he has raised. Rosen's use of brusque assertions in place of arguments puts the reader of *The Romantic Generation* in a Catch-22: in order to read the book carefully enough to understand it—to follow its author as he races from point to point, and to see around the omissions and eccentricities—you already have to be familiar with what you were expecting to learn about.

Most reviewers happily concede Rosen his points, largely, I believe, because he mobilizes so much material. He is not just a virtuoso of the keyboard (although I find the musicianship on the new CDs to be dishearteningly unpoetic), but a virtuoso of the library and of opinion-formation. He *always* has something, many things, to say. As Michael Kimmelman wrote in the New York *Times,* you hesitate to argue, for to do so is to invite a blizzard of facts, citations, examples, conclusions. Whether they all check out is another matter, but it's too late; you're already snowed in. It is easier to praise, and avoid the heavy weather altogether.

And yet there will be readers and listeners who find themselves arguing with this book anyway, those who find the bald conclusions, the legalistic justifications, the odd conceits to be rather a lot to swallow whole. *The Romantic Generation* reads like a collection of thoughts assembled in brilliant haste but never tested in skeptical reflection (the slips of memory and pen in the book appear to bear witness to this).[3] Possibly such reflection, such cool repose, is alien to so whirring and polymath a talent as his.

These criticisms must be tempered in the end by a sobering fact. The world of classical music is small and shrinking, and there are few within it who can communicate anything to those outside. Rosen is one, and for all the disappointments of *The Romantic Generation,* it is vastly superior to the general run of wider-audience books dealing with classical music. Rosen may be one of the last marketable writers who are willing to take music seriously on its own terms, one of the last for whom, say, the notion of Chopin as contrapuntist still fires the soul. It's not too hard to imagine him being taken to task by the PC crowd for explaining why baritones should not sing *Die Winterreise* and female singers should not sing *Die schöne Müllerin.* His justifications are excellent, but they are purely musical, and in our culture a musical idea is always secondary to a social one. For this reason alone his work and presence are to be heeded—even to be seen, in a way, as a vindication of the real value of music.

[3] Franz Wedekind for Frank Wedekind, *Petite Messe solonelle* for *Petite messe solennelle,* among others. The 39-bar example beginning on page 442 is missing ten accidentals, and one measure of music in the left hand. In reference to the hedgehog quote, Rosen finds it significant that Schlegel used a hedgehog rather than a porcupine, and says it is because a hedgehog is good-tempered, while a porcupine "shoots its quills." Quill-shooting porcupines are as mythical as unicorns. A likelier reason for Schlegel's choice is that porcupines are not native to Northern Europe.

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DAVID MASON

Poetry Chronicle

WHY IS MOST CONTEMPORARY POETRY SO DULL?

Consider three thoughts that occurred to me while reading the work of Charles Wright: his ideas are uninteresting, his poems undramatic; his language is only intermittently charged or lyrical; he is among the best-known poets of his generation. If you believe, as I do, that these three statements do not add up, you will also catch the drift of my rhetorical opening. We live in a world in which reputation has little to do with accomplishment. Given the broad context of contemporary American poetry, often so prosaic and self-regarding that it turns away anyone who is not a "professional reader," Charles Wright is a relatively honorable practitioner. Yet, going over most of his work in preparation to review *Chickamauga,* his new collection, I found very little that would justify paying hard-earned money to acquire it.[1] Most of his poems are so flat and passive that they should have been left in a drawer; instead, they have been published in prominent magazines like *The New Yorker.*

Wright's defenders will remind you of his Italian and Oriental influences, his long apprenticeship to Pound's *Cantos,* etc. They will also tell you that Wright's project is now to thwart the reader's expectations, as if the reader were merely an inconvenience. Reviewing *Chickamauga* in *The New Republic* (August 7, 1995), Helen Vendler performed extraordinary verbal gymnastics (and ultimately made a fool of herself), trying to prove Wright a major poet. Of his title poem, she writes, "[It] climbs to a vantage point where the anonymity of history has blanked out the details." History without details? What a brilliant idea! While we're at it, how about poetry without words? How about humming a few bars on a kazoo and calling it an epic? Vendler has often been a very good critic, and she should know better; she even extols Wright as a poet without qualities: "No objects, then; and no self; and no God. Has there ever been a more stringent set of requirements for poetry?" Never a duller one, I'll wager.

Slightly later, Professor Vendler anticipates my objections: "Such a poem will not be your choice if you are set on lyric that maintains the illusion of a direct mimetic personal speech by 'suppressing' its status as composed and measured language." But I still don't follow her; is she really suggesting that direct and personal lyrics suppress their status as measured language? Doesn't she remember her own work on Keats and

[1] CHICKAMAUGA, by *Charles Wright.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $19.00.

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Yeats? Weren't those poets both personal and measured? She calls Wright "interesting" because he is "a poet who wants to acknowledge in each of his poems that a poem is a coded piece of language and yet wants also to express, by that very code, the certainty that a piece of language exhibiting structure, grammar and syntax is not 'found art,' but has been arranged by a questing human consciousness forever incommunicado beneath its achieved mask." Read that passage again, then claw the wool from your eyes and you will see that Professor Vendler is committing fraud. She uses words like "measured language" and "structure," but never satisfactorily explains how they pertain to the poetry at hand. The insufficiency of art has been a subject of lyric poetry for a very long time, but never before the twentieth century has that subject been used to justify such complacency.

Meanwhile, what about poor Charles Wright? Wade through his watery oeuvre, and you will find moments of real precision. In one early poem, he remarks, "The evening, like / An old dog, circles the hills, / Anxious to settle." It's a fine, lovingly Southern image. But in the same book, *The Grave of the Right Hand*, one finds Wright at his weakest: "I would say, off-hand, that things / Are beginning to happen. . . ." His well-known poem "Two Stories," from *The Other Side of the River*, concludes, "I'm starting to think about the psychotransference of all things." These quotations are wrenched out of contexts that are not much more poetic. Wright's poems require a too-generous, theoretical critic like Vendler to give them stature, and many unsuspecting readers may not comprehend the power Vendler wields in the world of poetry, despite her questionable taste.

There is plenty of meditative near-spirituality in *Chickamauga*, but it's all air and light, history without the details:

> If sentences constitute
> everything we believe,
> Vocabularies retool
> Our inability to measure and get it right,
> And languages don't exist.
> That's one theory. Here's another:
> Something weighs on our shoulders
> And settles itself like black light
> invisibly in our
> hair . . .

Since critics don't buy the books they review, they have the luxury of praising hogwash. Pity the reader who gets suckered into paying for it. Wright disappoints me because he can at times create a lovely, quiet lyricism, as in a poem with a clumsy title, "After Reading Tu Fu, I Go Outside to the Dwarf Orchard," but his asceticism and habitual prosiness betray the very strengths he should be building on. He can do better, though in the present context he has precious little reason to try.

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Josephine Jacobsen, on the other hand, has been trying hard all her long life; her new collection charts both her restlessness and her achievement.[2] While Charles Wright's work takes on a formal and intellectual uniformity that becomes fruitlessly repetitive, Ms. Jacobsen has never fallen into such a rut. Born in Canada in 1908, but long a citizen of this country, she has flirted with several modern literary trends—including surrealism and the sort of linguistic diffidence we see in Wright—without ever losing her head to them. By remaining a maker, she rescues her poems from self-parody; she understands the material value of verse, free or measured. Frequently compared to Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, she shares their reticence and fascination with detail. She especially resembles Bishop in her love of travel; the peripatetic muse has inspired many of her best poems. But her poems would not be so charming if Ms. Jacobsen did not first learn how to make charm happen, as she does in this early poem, "Spring, Says the Child":

> There are words too ancient to be said by the lips of a child—
> Too old, too old for a child's soft reckoning—
> Ancient, terrible words, to a race unreconciled:
> *Death, spring . . .*
>
> The composite heart of man knows their awful age—
> They are frightening words to hear on a child's quick tongue.
> They overshadow, with their centuries' heritage,
> The tenderly young.
>
> *Death*, says the child, *spring*, says the child, and *heaven . . .*
> This is flesh against stone, warm hope against salt sea—
> This is all things soft, young, ignorant; this is even
> Mortality.

Charm is the surface beauty that lures us into the soul of poetry; it is precisely the quality most contemporary poetry lacks. In contrast to Wright's *Chickamauga*, Jacobsen's *In the Crevice of Time* is worth buying and going back to; we are called to the poems by their precision, their formal affirmations—even though the world they depict trembles with uncertainty. This is not to say there are no flawed pieces in the book; on many occasions she cripples rhythm or adopts language too fragmentary or opaque to matter. I prefer her when she is deliberately commanding. I also find her attitude toward art and life humane, as in the following lines about a prehistoric cave painter:

[2] IN THE CREVICE OF TIME: New and Collected Poems, by *Josephine Jacobsen*. Johns Hopkins University Press. $29.95.

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Our hulking confrère scraping the wall,
piling the dust over the motionless face:
in the abyss of time how he is close,
his art an act of faith, his grave
an act of art: for all,
for all, a celebration and a burial.

I could go on, listing her triumphs in poems like "Birdsong of the Lesser Poet," "Gentle Reader," "An Absence of Slaves," "Pondicherry Blues," "Mr. Mahoney," "The Provider," "The Sisters," "The Birthday Party" and "Survivor's Ballad," but there is no space here to do justice to a poet who has done such justice to us.

Giving the world its due—that is a fine task for the poet, not succumbing to some easy and self-defeating relativism. As a reader I appreciate poets who command the page and, better still, the voice. Precise and memorable language arises from such control, and the greatest poets take our breath away by writing nearly always at that pitch. No one considered in this review comes up to that level—Shakespeare has not been reincarnated—but in the best of the twenty-nine books I considered, there were glimmerings of hope for the language, which in turn gave me hope about life. That is a paradox of poetry; it can sing despairingly and find help in the song. It can also tell stories. Both singing and storytelling are poetry's most ancient and enduring functions, and I find it incredible that so many contemporary poets attempt to deny this truth one way or another.

Luckily, we have good writers like Ellen Bryant Voigt who give us sturdy, lucid poems. In her new book, *Kyrie*, Voigt creates a polyphonic narrative about the influenza pandemic in the aftermath of WW I.[3] Given the magnitude of her topic—twenty-five million deaths worldwide, half a million in the U.S. alone—I am surprised to recall having read so little about it before now. These statistics demonstrate that in approximately one year, 1918–19, we lost nearly as many Americans as were killed in the entire Civil War, and the occurrence of new viral strains reminds us that the disaster Voigt recounts could happen again.

The plague and AIDS have made huge impressions upon literature; perhaps influenza seems too common by comparison, less dramatic. In any case, Voigt makes an involving book out of it. Written as a sequence of short poems, some of them sonnets and what you might call pseudo-sonnets, *Kyrie* resembles a smaller *Spoon River Anthology* in its assembly of voices. But Voigt does not name many of her speakers, leaving their speech disembodied, ghostly even when they are still alive. Her short "Prologue" views the catastrophe from a distance:

[3] KYRIE, by *Ellen Bryant Voigt*. Norton. $17.95.

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> After the first year, weeds and scrub;
> after five, juniper and birch,
> alders filling in among the briars;
> ten more years, the birches crowded out,
> a new world swarms on the floor of the hardwood forest.
> And who can tell us where there was an orchard,
> where a swing, where the smokehouse stood?

This is history with the details restored. We encounter a young woman named Mattie, witness much of the arbitrary dying through her eyes. At other points a doctor talks, or a soldier overseas who is baffled by the suffering at home. At still other points Voigt seems to search for the voice of history itself:

> *O, O, the world wouldn't stop—*
> the neighborhood grocer, the neighborhood cop
> laid them down and never did rise.
> And some of their children, and some of their wives,
> fell into bed and never got up,
> fell into bed and never got up.

This small book incorporates the long and the short views, individual suffering weighed with compassion and released to the all-encompassing tides of nature. Voigt manages a vision that is both scientific and spiritual, and in doing so she gives the world some of its due.

I began this review with disparaging remarks about a prominent American poet, Charles Wright, and I do not feel very much better about the Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella. Americans have had a hard time following Kinsella's career because so much of his work is self-published overseas in pamphlets. Since abandoning the lyric mode of his early verse for a belated modernist opacity, Kinsella has often been unable or unwilling to speak to a larger public. Meanwhile, Seamus Heaney has courted the public masterfully, and Michael Longley and Derek Mahon have busied themselves writing superbly accessible poems, to say nothing of Richard Murphy and others. There is something admirably stubborn about Kinsella, but I don't think he is producing the great work of which he is capable. Too much of his latest collection, *From Centre City*, reads like a crackpot's letters to an editor.[4] "Enough," he writes at the end of "One Fond Embrace." "That there is more spleen / than good sense in all of this, I admit. . . ." He has complaints about everything in contemporary life, but few of his complaints rise to the level of satire—Kinsella is no Jonathan Swift. In "At the Head Table" he writes of a man "devoted / . . . / to the avoidance of affectation," and perhaps avoidance is Kinsella's primary vice. After all,

[4] FROM CENTRE CITY, by *Thomas Kinsella*. Oxford University Press. $10.95p.

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he has translated the great Irish poems of the past, and has the talent and skill to join such company himself, yet he fritters it away on poems that are inconsequential, even ruined by clichés: "We are all only pilgrims. / Travelling the night."

We get a glimmer of what he might accomplish in his fine literary satire, "Open Court":

> Three poets sprawl,
> silent, minor, by the wall.
> Locked in his private agony,
> showing the yellow of his eye,
> a ruined Arnold turns his face
> snarling into empty space,
> flecks of black about his lips.
> Next, a ruined Auden slips
> lower on the leather seat,
> his tonsure sunken in defeat
> —roused to fits and starts of life
> by the distant shrilling of his wife.
> Last, downcast and liquid-lipped,
> umbrella handle moistly gripped
> and staring inward, doomed and mild,
> a ruined, speechless Oscar Wilde.

This poem provides several of the collection's few lively moments. Kinsella seems to have seen and judged all the poses of which poets are capable, but his own misanthropic pose should not excuse him from the task of writing finished poems.

If Kinsella's career presently feels played out, his ambition unfulfilled, the Irish-American Billy Collins gets further by abandoning ambition altogether.[5] "This guy's a kick," I thought as I read him, ticking off poem after poem worth quoting from. His conversational, passive diction tells you this is not a poet who weighs every word. He's a dreamy, easy-going raconteur who, like a modern Whitman, plants a version of himself squarely in the work. In "Medium," he compares his method to that of a water colorist, where the light touch and glide of the brush require more skill than we often realize:

> I would love to write on water
> like the final words of Keats
> so a current would carry the sentences away
> and the slightest breeze would ruffle
> the glassy curves of their meaning.

[5] THE ART OF DROWNING, by *Billy Collins*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $24.95; 10.95.

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I want to write on air
as in the rapid language of signs
or in the lighting of a cigarette,
both hands cupped near the mouth,
then one waving out the flame
and the long, silent exhalation of smoke,
the gate of the body swinging open.

It's typical of contemporary poets to provide an *ars poetica* for critics to retail in their reviews, but in point of fact, many of Collins' poems are about poetry or related matters. He even works in parodies of Shelley, Stevens, Whitman and Frost. Though apparently disdainful of traditional academic standards, Collins' persona sounds to me like an aw-shucks English professor who succeeds at being one of the boys. He hides his sophistication well. His poems usually establish a conceit—such as the question of whether drowning people see their lives flash before their eyes—and play riffs on it until his ingenuity just runs out. The result is perfectly charming, often prosaic and rarely deathless. Billy Collins is easy listening for the literary set.

David Dooley's work is also self-consciously arty; *The Revenge by Love* even comes prefaced by an explanatory essay from Allen Hoey, and its longest poem is a sequence called "O'Keeffe and Stieglitz," about the famous painter and her husband, the photographer and gallery owner.[6] Dooley is uncommon among contemporary poets, devoting himself almost exclusively to narrative modes. He is very good at them; I agree with Hoey's statement that "Dooley's best poems invite us to know these characters the way we know real people: in their fullness." The most striking element of the new collection is its daring range of subject matter. In "Politics" an aging homosexual looks back on his life, his political talk apparently aimed at nothing more than the seduction of his auditor; in "Zoramel" a writer sleeps "with his best friend's girl," yet the emotional fallout of that event hardly registers in comparison to the dramatic world of his fantasy novel. These poems read like superb examples of contemporary short fiction, which leads me to my only real complaint about Dooley's method: I'm not convinced that verse is his inevitable métier. Though his long free-verse lines are very much up to the task of conveying his sharply-etched characters, I don't see many moments when the lines really pay off as lines. I remember scenes and tones, not the words that convey them.

Hoey's essay struggles to distinguish Dooley's verse technique from the prose sections of "O'Keeffe and Stieglitz," and he quotes from an essay of Dooley's called "The Formalism of the Prose Poem," but proof is in the pudding. The spirit of Robert Browning lingers behind a poem like "Politics," but not the technique; one can find at least half a dozen

[6] THE REVENGE BY LOVE, by *David Dooley*. Story Line Press. $11.95p.

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A SELECT **HUDSON REVIEW** PUBLICATION

Poems by Ghalib

translated by
AIJAZ AHMAD
with
WILLIAM STAFFORD
and
ADRIENNE RICH
forenote by
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meaningful enjambements in "My Last Duchess," a claim that cannot be made for any of Dooley's poems. Still, there are lovely passages like this one in the voice of Georgia O'Keeffe:

> My dear, I have a curious triumphant feeling about life.
> Seeing it bleak. Knowing it so and walking into it fearless
> because one has no choice. Enjoying one's consciousness.
> You spoiled me for other men, you know.
> How sharply the bonelight winks tonight!

That one word, "bonelight," so appropriate for O'Keeffe, also captures the muted assurance of Dooley's book.

David Sanders' brief debut volume, *Time in Transit*, is remarkable for its lucid grace.[7] I have technical quibbles about some of his poems—a tendency to enjamb stanzas so often that the stanzas themselves lose identity, his occasionally faltering meter, etc.—but their quiet subtlety and careful diction impress me, especially in "Dream of the Coal Hands," "Short Wave" and "Dressing the Pheasant." A briefer sample of his work is "Housekeeping," quoted below:

> The living pack us up.
> Now that we have gone and died
> it's comforting to them
> to know that we are tucked inside
>
> a box, an urn, or closet
> where memories, like dreams, abound.
> They tend to the mess
> our dying first has left around.
>
> (Letters dried to mica,
> clothes gone further out of style,
> souvenirs of us
> in storage, kept a little while.)
>
> They allow themselves sadness,
> drifting near this windy border.
> But grief has raked out its embers,
> which cool and die among the order.

The risky echo of Emily Dickinson's "The Bustle in a House" shows up the shortcomings of the final stanza, but the best parts of *Time in Transit* prove David Sanders a poet worth watching closely.

Felix Stefanile wears his learning so lightly that a careless reader may

[7] TIME IN TRANSIT, by *David Sanders*. Literary House Press of Washington College. $20.00.

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fail to notice it, but no one can fail to be moved by the generosity and compassion of his new collection.[8] For many years the editor of a delightfully eccentric and important journal called *Sparrow*, Stefanile has championed metered verse without succumbing to stuffiness; readers of *The Hudson Review* also know him as a witty and deeply knowledgeable critic. In his poems he writes of Italian-American experience, his youth in Brooklyn and soldiering in WW II, fashioning his verse from an elegant vernacular. A good example is "Elegy, 1942," which I first read in *The Sewanee Review*:

> Dowd was the old man of the company,
> the one we listened to. He taught us tricks,
> like sewing, or he showed us how to roll
> a cigarette, or how to take stove black
> and cover over cracks in a worn locker
> and make it shine. Whenever he got drunk
> he'd sing, in a low whisper, some old tune,
> "An Orphan and in love," and go to sleep.
> He cowed those blackjack players in the back
> who liked to stay up late, and swear and smoke,
> and keep us all awake, night after night.
> When Dowd was by, we slept like innocents.

In the same quiet, conversational manner, the poem details a friendship, a mutual respect that crosses divisions of class and culture, between Dowd and another soldier named Cerruti. It concludes at the moment when Cerruti learns of Dowd's death in a North Sea convoy:

> Cerruti dropped his boots, and walked outside;
> I watched him through the window, pacing, blinking,
> kicking at gravel, searching for the words,
> until like death-besotted Lear he shouted
> fuck it fuck it fuck it fuck it fuck it.

Stefanile's poems are full of period feeling and detail. They give credence to specific lives and do not waste time with trendy theories, but speak to us of experience in vivid terms. There are many more of them that I could quote and discuss at length: "The Dance at St. Gabriel's," "Ballade of the Sad Celebrities," "The Bocce Court on Lewis Avenue," "From an Apartment House Window," and "Hubie." Perhaps a critic like Helen Vendler could think of nothing to say in the face of such simple elegance, and that is why she praises Charles Wright instead—he gives her something to explain. But I don't think that sort of criticism serves poetry half as much as Felix Stefanile has served it, writing as he does.

[8] THE DANCE AT ST. GABRIEL'S, by *Felix Stefanile.* Story Line Press. $12.95p.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DANA GIOIA recently moved to Santa Rosa, California. . . . "The Death of a Finch" will be included in BERT O. STATES's book *Seeing in the Dark: Reflections on Dreams and Dreaming*, due out from Yale University Press. . . . LOUIS SIMPSON's most recent publications are a book of poems, *There You Are*, and a book of memoirs, *The King My Father's Wreck*, both published by Story Line Press. . . . LYNNE McMAHON's* most recent book is *Devolution of the Nude* (David R. Godine). She is currently on a Guggenheim Foundation grant to complete a third book of poems. . . . JOSEPH EPSTEIN's most recent book is *With My Trousers Rolled* (1995), a collection of familiar essays. His next contribution to *The Hudson Review* will be an essay on the life and work of Robert Lowell. . . . ANDREW HUDGINS' *The Glass Hammer: A Southern Childhood* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1994. . . . THOMAS M. DISCH is presently the Artist-in-Residence at the College of William & Mary. His next contribution to *The Hudson Review* will be a review of new books by Robert McDowell and David Mason. . . . ROBERT RICHMAN* is poetry editor of *The New Criterion*. . . . JEROME MAZZARO continues to live and write in Buffalo, New York. He is the author of three volumes of poetry. . . . An essay on Kingsley Amis by GEORGE WATSON will appear in an early issue of *The Hudson Review*.

DEAN FLOWER was a member of the Selection Committee which awarded the 1994 Bennett Award to Frank Tuohy at a ceremony in New York City on June 13, 1995. . . . MARCIA B. SIEGEL's critical biography of Doris Humphrey, *Days on Earth*, was published in 1987. Siegel was a keynote speaker at the Humphrey Centennial Conference at Teachers College. In January she gave a three-day workshop, "Doris Humphrey and the Roots of Modern Dance," at Boston Conservatory. . . . JOHN LOUGHERY is the author most recently of *John Sloan: Painter and Rebel* (Henry Holt). . . . BERT CARDULLO's essay "The Real Fascination of *Citizen Kane*" has been anthologized in the recent volume *Critical Perspectives on "Citizen Kane"* (G.K. Hall), along with his translation of André Bazin's "The Technique of *Citizen Kane*." . . . CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK's next piece in *The Hudson Review* will be a review of *From the Beast to the Blonde* by Marina Warner. . . . HAROLD FROMM delivered a paper at an ecocritical session called "The Nature of Cities" at MLA in Chicago after Christmas. . . . JOSIAH FISK is the editor of the new edition of *Composers on Music*, an anthology of composers' writings, to be published this autumn by Northeastern University Press. . . . DAVID MASON's new book of poems, *The Country I Remember*, has just been published by Story Line Press.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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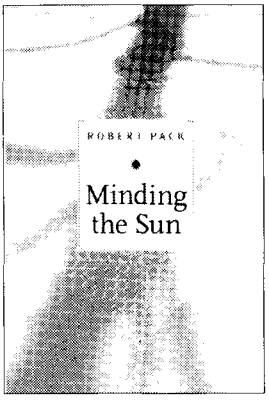

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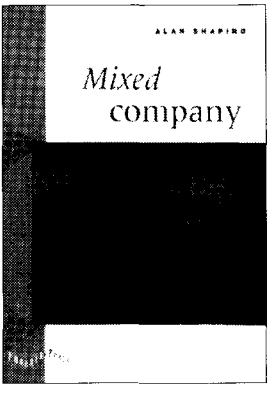

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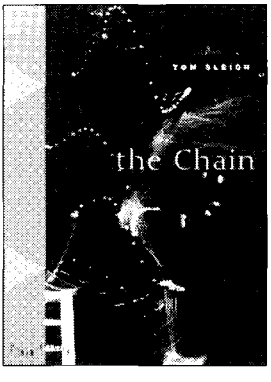

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IN THIS ISSUE:

A literary manuscript allows the viewer to probe—however subjectively or inadequately—the mystery of artistic genius. If it is a great manuscript, it invites one to observe an author at a moment when he or she performed at the limits of human possibility. The printed text may allow one to view that performance from the stadium stand, but the manuscript puts one at the author's side. Here, as so often in the arts, there is a powerful element of voyeurism.

—Dana Gioia, "The Hand of the Poet: The Magical Value of Manuscripts," p. 9.

In summary it [Empson's philosophy of history] goes like this. Since about 480 B.C., when Buddha, Confucius, Pythagoras and the second Isaiah died, mankind has been dragged down against their better advice into intolerance, persecution and religious wars by harsh dogmas of a single universal ruler, of divine rewards and punishments in an afterlife. Religion, as the Middle Ages and the modern age have known it, has made mankind worse; and what Ireland, the Balkans and the Middle East illustrate in our times is the abiding peril of imagining that there is only one God and that you know what He wants and means. Bohemian morals are not only more agreeable, then, than those of a church congregation, but more elevating too. It is your duty to have fun.

—George Watson, "Prophet Against God: William Empson (1906–84)," p. 75.

One afternoon, when I was either eight or nine and living in the village of Albion just outside Punxsutawney, it came to pass (and not for the first time) that I threw a large rock at a robin foraging too busily in my back yard. To my utter shock the rock struck the bird squarely on the back and in a quivering instant it was dead. What I remember of the feeling produced by this event is a sense of shame, terrible immediate guilt . . . , confusion, and, possibly, *just* possibly, a rudimentary tincture of the most profound of all emotions—grief—which I could not yet have known at first hand.

—Bert O. States, "The Death of a Finch," p. 30.

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